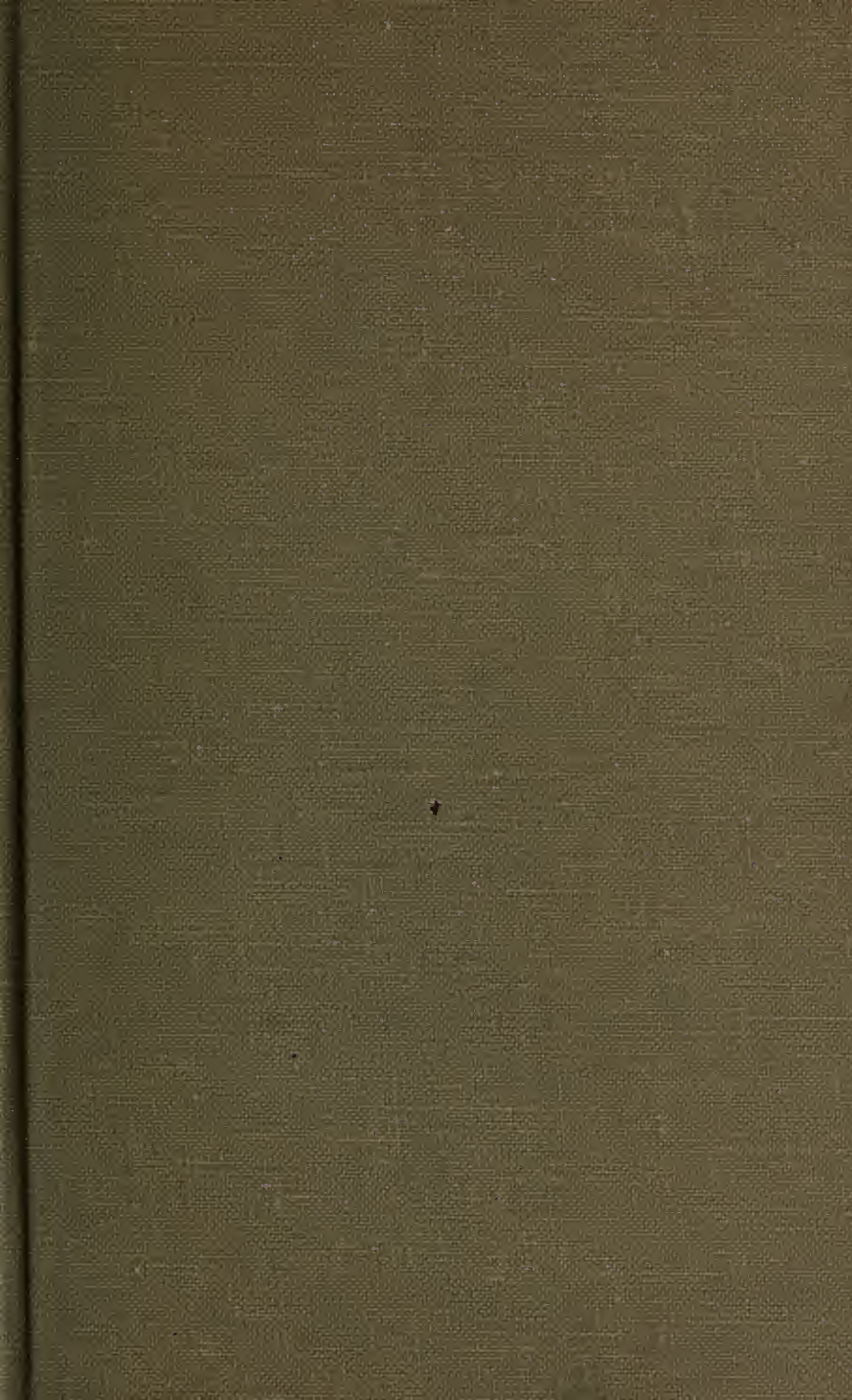




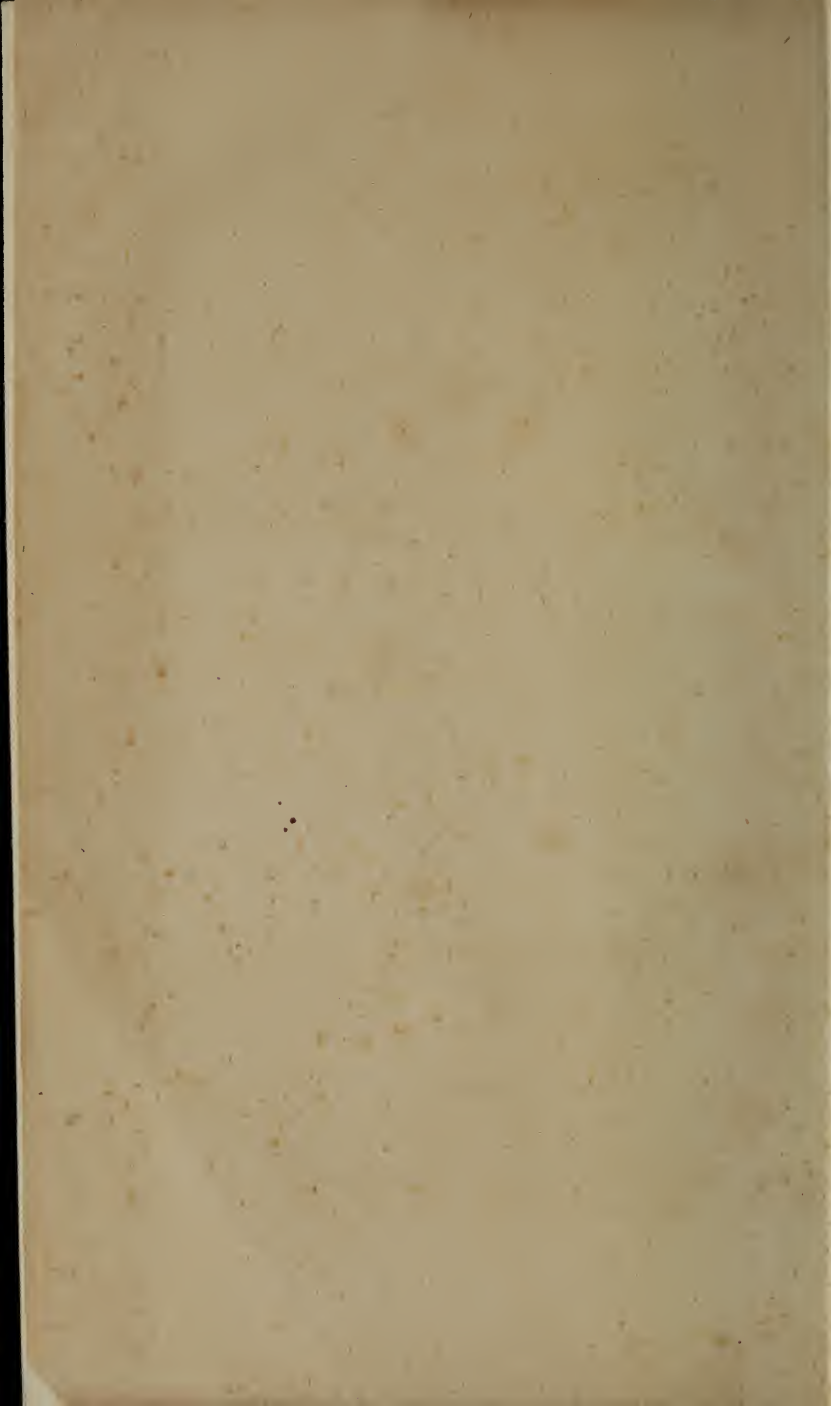












THE
PRACTICAL CHURCH MEMBER:

BEING

A GUIDE TO THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

OF

NEW ENGLAND.

BY JOHN MITCHELL,

PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, FAIR HAVEN, CONN.

“Beholding your Order and the steadfastness of your Faith in Christ.”

Col. ii. 5.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

PAGE

Importance of the subject. The First Church. Settlement of New England. State of society. First Ministers of New England. Discussion of Church Polity. Platforms. Present character of the New England Churches - - - - -	13
---	----

CHAPTER II.

PRINCIPLES OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ORDER.

Constitution of Churches. Members. Officers. Creeds. Self-government of the Churches. Practical results of the system - - - - -	31
---	----

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH COVENANT AND WATCH.

Nature of the Covenant. Mutual Watch of Members. Object—Spirit and Manner—and Importance, of the Duty - - - - -	59
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

Ends of Discipline. Means. Private Offences. Public Offences. Manner of Proceeding. Forsaking Com-	
--	--

	PAGE
munion. Miscellaneous and General Remarks on the subject of Discipline. Treatment of Excommunicated Persons - - - - -	67

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH MEETINGS and CHURCH BUSINESS.

Importance of Church Meetings. Duty of Attending. Order to be observed in them. Articles of Practice —Temperance. Standing Committees - - -	107
---	-----

CHAPTER VI.

RELATIONS OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

The Pastoral Office. Settled Ministers, and Itinerant Preachers. Pastoral Prerogatives and Rights. Rights of the People - - - - -	117
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

DEACONS.

Origin. Qualifications. Duties. Introduction into Office - - - - -	131
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

RELIGIOUS MEETINGS.

Public Worship. The Evening Lecture. The Social Prayer-Meeting. Preparatory Lecture. Concert -	135
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

MEASURES FOR THE PROMOTION OF RELIGION.

“New Measures.” Importance of Stated Ordinances and Means of Grace. Lay Preaching. Female Speaking in Promiscuous Assemblies. Hasty Ad-	
---	--

CONTENTS.

V

PAGE

missions to the Church. General Observance of Or-	
der - - - - -	143

CHAPTER X.

RELATIONS OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY—PARISH AFFAIRS.

Settlement of a Pastor. Support of the Pastor. Vari-	
ous Modes of Providing for Parish Expenses—Taxes—	
Rent of Pews—Subscription—Funds—Sabbath Col-	
lections. (Meeting Houses) Free Seats. Secular	
Use of Churches. Parsonages. The Young Men.	
Schools - - - - -	173

CHAPTER XI.

INTERCOURSE OF CHURCHES.

Dismission of Members from one Church to another.—	
Exchanges. Councils. Associations. Transfer of	
Ministers from one Church to another - - -	211

CHAPTER XII.

RELATIONS AND INTERCOURSE WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS.

Relations with Presbyterians. Deportment towards	
Churches not in Communion with us. Proselyting,	
and its Unworthy Arts. Joint-stock Meeting Houses.	
Union Meetings. Catholicism - - - - -	221

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

Things requisite to the Practical Christian—Holiness—	
Prayer—Knowledge—A sound Faith—Concern for	
the Purity of the Church—Judgment—Candor—Pru-	
dence—Liberality—Constancy and Perseverance -	239

ERRATUM.—At page 144, 3rd line from bottom, for “*settled* tendencies,” read *subtle* tendencies.

Correction.—The number of Congregational Churches in England and Wales is larger by several hundreds than I have stated, page 15. The number there given (1600 or 1700,) is only the number *associated* in the “Congregational Union of England and Wales.” This, upon the authority of one of the Baptist Delegates from England, now in this country.

PREFACE.

THIS little volume has been written with reference to the youthful and growing Congregation of which it is the Author's happiness to be the Pastor. If it should please God to make it serviceable to *them*, my end is answered and my labor abundantly repaid: if its usefulness should be extended beyond *them*, I shall have the greater cause to be thankful.

The *title* will remind the reader of some other books, from abler pens than mine. I allude to the "Church Member's Guide," by Mr. James, the "Church Manual," by Mr. Bacon, and the "Tribute to the Memory of the Pilgrims," by Dr. Hawes,—books with which I hope the reader is too well acquainted to make it necessary for me to speak of their excellence and worth. The *topics*, however, of this volume, are, for the most part, distinct from the matter of those. Our several roads may lie within sight of each other, but are seldom coincident. If mine lie in a more humble region than those, if it lead through a tract more monotonous and less productive of emotion, it is also less frequented and beaten, and on that account may contribute something to the profiting of the traveler, if not to his amusement.

It will be noticed that a number of the subjects discussed or touched upon in the following pages, are matters which fall

among the controversies of the times. I have taken them up as they came in my way, and endeavored to dispose of them agreeably to the dictates of the Bible and common sense, not expecting to meet the views of everybody. It is impossible to be universally orthodox in an age when almost every subject, doctrinal or practical, is matter of excited altercation,—when with many, truth itself is *ultraism*, while with others, sobriety of judgment is too lukewarm a quality, and “meek-eyed” charity too smooth of tongue, to suit their inflammable zeal.

Without attempting to write, in a formal way, on our ecclesiastical polity, I have wished to promote among our people a more general acquaintance with that subject. I do not suppose that Church order is the most important thing in religion. But neither is it the least important. It certainly is not *unimportant*. Churches were instituted by Christ for particular purposes ; to wit, the edification of the members, and the efficient propagation of religion in the world ; and it is obvious that the *manner* of their constitution, that is, their polity, must have much to do with their adaptedness to the ends in view ; and of course, that it can never be otherwise than an important subject to be studied and known. One could not wish, indeed, to see it exalted into that undue consequence, relatively considered, which was assigned to it in the discussions of by-gone centuries, much less to resuscitate the spirit of those discussions ; but neither is it well that it be wholly neglected.

Besides the intrinsic and proper importance of the subject, it is desirable to know something about it, to be able to estimate

the comparative claims of the different existing systems. We still hear of the *lineage* and validity of this order and that,—for though discussion has in a great measure ceased, as to this particular field, pretension has not,—and it needs some intelligence to settle us.

As to the Congregational system, its claims to a scriptural antiquity, and its practical utility, will be best understood, and most truly, and I trust most highly appreciated, by those who have studied it most. If it be as “*primitive*” as the Scriptures, and was familiar to Paul, it is doubtless primitive enough, and quite tolerably “*apostolic*,” the claims notwithstanding, of primogeniture by others.

Be this as it may, I cannot but think we are suffering it to fall into too much neglect among us. Our fathers sought truth on this subject with the same conscientiousness and care, as they sought the mind of Christ on other subjects. They sought it at the expense of persecution and exile; and having, with unwearied pains, found it, they rejoiced in it. It was to them “like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” In that age of ecclesiastical confusion, and of turning back towards popery, they professed that “they looked upon the discovery and settlement of the Congregational way, as the boon, the gratuity, the largess of divine bounty, which the Lord graciously bestowed on his people that followed him into the wilderness.” But we, their descendants, so far from entering into their studies, are almost

content to be ignorant of the very *results* of them, furnished to our hands. Is it not true,—and if it be true, is there not utterly a fault among us,—that not a few of our ministers do not inform *themselves* even, much less acquaint their people, thoroughly, with the principles and grounds of our ecclesiastical system? And does it not hence arise, that our people are often too little intelligent in this matter properly to discharge the duties which our system requires of them as members; and too little established in their views to be not soon unsettled and drawn away to churches of a different order, whose polity they find to be more insisted on, and whose claims they are not qualified to canvass? Ought we not, as a part of our duty to our churches, and especially when large accessions are made to them of the subjects of our revivals, to instruct them, not only in the doctrines and moral duties of their religion, but in the polity also, under which it is their duty and privilege to act?

“The Principles and Practice of the Congregational Churches,” become the more important in view of the place which these churches occupy, and doubtless are destined to occupy, in relation to the great cause of Christ on earth. It is not to be supposed, indeed, that the world is to be converted by means of any one denomination of Christians. All shall be privileged to share in that glorious achievement. But if we consider the history of these New England churches, with their numerous and increasing offspring in the west—if we consider the way in which God has led them from the beginning, who “sifted three

kingdoms that he might plant the American wilderness with the finest of the wheat,"—if we consider their principles and spirit, their institutions, their intelligence, their presses, their zeal for moral reform, enlightened, principled, and constant; and their liberal devotedness to the work of missions and other objects of universal philanthropy; we cannot but suppose that they are to have a very prominent agency in the renovation of the world. It is therefore important that every member of their communion, should be prepared with every sort of instruction and qualification for the fulfilment of so high a destiny.

If this humble volume contribute at all to such a result,—if it cause so much as one church, or member, of so important a communion, to be better informed, or more judicious—if it cast a *little* salt into so great a fountain,—it will not be valueless, nor the labor of it lost.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL- AL CHURCHES.

IF every man should know something of the history of his own religious communion, it is especially desirable that such a history as that of the founders of the Churches of New England should, by every means, be kept alive in the minds of their posterity. The character of our Pilgrim Fathers, the causes and objects of their removal hither, the hardships they suffered—more for the sake of us their children, than for their own,—have a most sacred claim upon our memory. It is a history which every son of New England should value as his birth-right. “No sober New Englander, (says Dr. Dwight) can read the history of his country, without rejoicing that God has caused him to spring from the loins of such ancestors, and given him his birth in a country whose public concerns were entrusted to their management:” and it may be added, that no New Englander who is willingly ignorant of that history is worthy of his origin; or capable of appreciating, or competent to defend, the inestimable inheritance which has descended to him. “I shall count my country lost, (says Cotton Mather) in the loss of the primitive principles, and the primitive practices, upon which it was

at first established :” that loss, however, will ensue, and New England will cease to be New England, when her degenerate children, (if that should ever be,) shall be generally ignorant of her history, or cease to revere the memory of her founders.

It is not, however, the design, nor is it within the compass, of this volume, to give such a history. A few things only can be noticed, as introductory to the matters which are to follow.

The Congregational polity, at least in some of its leading features, began early to be discussed, among the schemes which occupied the Reformers of the sixteenth century, but did not assume a visible and permanent existence till about 1600. The exiled church at Leyden, under the care of the celebrated Robinson, which afterwards removed to Plymouth, in New England, is regarded as the mother of the Congregational sister-hood, and its pastor, as the founder of the Congregational plan.

This church was gathered in England in 1602. Being harrassed by an intolerant establishment, they removed, a few years after, to Holland, and thence, in 1620, to Plymouth; where the first detachment of them arrived, in a forlorn condition, in the depth of winter. From the distresses of the sea, which had detained them long upon its bosom, they escaped, at length, to encounter the greater distresses of a houseless forest and an inclement season,—distresses, both of sea and land,

which only a piety like theirs would have been willing to encounter, and a faith like theirs, been able to sustain.

The settlement at Plymouth was the first of the religious colonies which, within a few years after, during the "Laudian persecution," peopled the streams and harbors of New England. And this was the beginning of Congregationalism in this country.

Meantime, a branch of the same vine was beginning to take root in England. The first church which was gathered there, after Mr. Robinson's, was organized, with simple and affecting solemnities, in 1616. Its pastor was a Mr. Jacob, who during a visit to Leyden had embraced Mr. Robinson's views. In that unpropitious soil, it struggled with even greater difficulties, of another kind, than these encountered which were planted in the wilderness. "It subsisted almost by a miracle for above twenty-four years, shifting from place to place, to avoid the notice of the public," till, the times changing, it openly appeared in a house of worship in 1640.* From these oppressed beginnings, Congregationalism in England has gone on increasing and flourishing, "as a grain of mustard seed," till it now numbers, in that country and in Wales, about 1600 or 1700 congregations, and as many ministers. Of its numbers in Scotland I am not informed; but if the eulogy of the celebrated Chalmers, (a Presbyterian) be

* Neal.

just, who says of the Scottish Congregationalists, that they are "the purest body of Christians in the united kingdom," it is to be wished that the number were greater than it is, whatever it may be.

The state of society in the New England settlements, as might be expected from the causes which originated them, was altogether peculiar. It was entirely and eminently religious. It might be said of every family, that it was a pious family; of every adult individual, that he was strictly moral, if not religious; and of every child, that he was piously educated. They were of the best people of England. For it is the best people,—the most pious and exemplary always, and commonly not the least intelligent and respectable, that persecution banishes from its communion, while it retains the worst. They were the best people of Jerusalem, "who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen." They were of the best people of France who fled on the revocation of the edict of Nantes. And England had no better people within her bosom than she exiled from it, by the intolerable vexations of her High Commission and other spiritual courts. The immoral and unprincipled—people of lax lives and pliant consciences—are not the people who either disturb the persecutor, or are disturbed by him. When the Rev. Mr. Cotton, the first minister of Boston, a man of excellent learning and piety, and of much repute in England, as he afterwards was in this country, was informed against in the High

Commission, and applied to the earl of Dorset for his interest with the primate, the earl sent him word that, "if he had been guilty of drunkenness, uncleanness, or any such *lesser fault*, he could have got his pardon; but the sin of *puritanism* and *non-conformity* was unpardonable, and therefore he must fly for his safety." It was for "the sin of puritanism and non-conformity," and for no other "fault," that our fathers were forced to leave.

The settlers of New England were all of one persuasion. There was no mixture of emulous and proselyting sects. All the inhabitants of a parish were called by the same bell to the same sanctuary; all loved and respected the same pastor; instructed their children in the same schools, and catechisms; mourned together in the same church yard: all kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; being called in one hope of their calling; having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. If they originally brought any diversity of views with them, their common piety, and common trials, and the earnestness and simplicity of their common search for truth, soon matured them into harmony.

This happy unity prevailed for several generations. Nor was this a drowsy and secure state of things. The presence of God was eminently with them. The first age of New England was one of an almost continuous revival. Preaching was attended with so much power, in some places, "that it was a common inquiry by such

members of a family as were detained at home on a Sabbath, whether any had been visibly awakened in the house of God that day." "Few Sabbaths did pass without some evidently converted, and some convincing proof of the power of God accompanying his word."* Thus the children of the settlers, as they came forward into life, under the faithful care of their parents, and ministers, were gathered, by the favor of God, into the same communion with themselves. The Spirit of revivals has overshadowed these churches from the beginning.†

* Prince's Christian History.

† There was one considerable period of extensive and alarming declension in the early days of New England. It commenced, visibly, about 1660 or 1670, i. e. with the third generation. The days of trial had by that time passed away, and prosperity had succeeded. Prosperity is the greatest of all trials to churches.

But even of *this* period, Mather, the historian, says, "Indeed the people of God in this land were not so far gone in degeneracy, but that there were further degrees of disorder and corruption to be found in other, yea, in *all* other places, where the protestant religion is professed; and the most impartial observers must have acknowledged, that there was proportionably still more of true religion, and a larger number of the strictest saints, in this country, than in any other on the face of the earth. But it was to be confessed, that the degeneracy of New England *in any measure*, into the spirit of the world, was a thing extremely aggravated by the greatness of our obligations to the contrary." *Magnal. Book V.* In view of this declension there

Thus one in sentiment, and thus blessed, were the early churches of New England. I have heard opinions and reasonings advanced in support of the supposed good effects of a diversity of sects; but I have seen no evidence of such effects, like the evidence to the contrary in the history of these churches. There is no *scripture* for the position, that I am aware of, (but much to the contrary,) and I fear there are no *facts*. Has the condition of New England been improved by the flooding of sects into it? Have we more piety, and better morals? Was such diversity of sects deemed desirable in the apostle's days? The benefits—what are they, in comparison of the evils? They are to be shown, perhaps, by Pope's doctrine, "All discord, harmony not understood;" or by the philosophy of an older theo-

was a special meeting, or synod, called at Boston, to consider a work of reform: and it is remarkable with what fidelity and minuteness this synod went into an inquiry respecting the prevailing sins,—the result of which they published. A similar reform was engaged in in Connecticut. Many churches set apart seasons for special prayer, faithful inquiry, and solemn renewal of covenant; and "very remarkable was the blessing of God upon the churches which did so." "Many thousands of spectators will testify, that they never saw the special presence of the great God our Savior more notably discovered than in the solemnities of those opportunities." *Mather*.

Though there was no *general* revival during this period, which continued till the great awakening of 1629 and 1640, there were numerous *local* ones, as e. g. in Northampton, where there were five during the ministry of Mr. Shepard.

rist, who tells us that "the whole world is kept in order by discord ; and every part of it is a more particular composed jarre." Are divisions and subdivisions of congregations, into handfuls of people ; are more houses than can be filled, and more ministers than are needed ; are rivalries and jealousies, and strifes and envyings ; are gradations of truth and of error, accommodated to all sorts of men ; are schemes against schemes, and churches against churches ; and lo ! here, and lo ! there, the benefits intended ? I know it is with God to bring good out of evil ; and how much he may bring out of this is known only to him : but the *evils* are manifest, and the sin, I fear, great. "For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men ? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal ?

The first ministers of New England were episcopally ordained, and had been settled pastors previous to their coming hither. "I have before me, (says Neal,) a list of seventy-seven divines who became pastors of sundry churches and congregations in New England before 1640, all of whom were in orders in the Church of England." They received their ordination, generally, in the time of the mild arch-bishop Abbot, a man of such piety and temper, that had his predecessor, Bancroft, and his successor, Laud, been men of the like views and spirit, New England had not been settled as it was. They received their education at the Universities of

Cambridge and Oxford, and were all of them respectably, and some of them extensively, if not profoundly, learned. Their excellence, both as preachers and as men, has been abundantly testified to, by men, not only of their own, but of other persuasions. Two persons* who well knew them, have left the following account of them. "We that saw the persons, who, from four famous colonies assembled in the synod that agreed on our Platform of Church Discipline, cannot forget their excellent character. They were men of great renown in the nation from whence the Laudian persecution exiled them: their learning, their holiness, their gravity, struck all men that knew them with admiration. They were Timothies in their houses, Chrysostoms in their pulpits, Augustines in their disputations. The prayers, the studies, the humble inquiries, with which they sought after the mind of God, were as likely to prosper as any means upon earth. And the *sufferings* wherein they

* Rev. John Higginson, son of the first minister of Salem, and Rev. William Hubbard, minister of Ipswich; both born in England. These venerable men, at an advanced period of their lives, anxious to perpetuate "the old principles of New England," drew up a joint paper, expressly for after generations, which they left behind them, with the following superscription: "*A testimony to the Order of the gospel in the churches of New England: left in the hands of the churches by the two most aged ministers of the gospel yet surviving in the country.*" The former died 1708, aged 93; the latter in 1704, aged

were confessors for the name and the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, add unto the arguments which would persuade us, that our gracious Lord would reward and honor them, with communicating much of his truth unto them."

There was no one subject which engaged the attention of the founders of New England more than the subject of church polity. Having escaped from the half reformed protestantism of their native land, they were deeply anxious to establish a system here according to the true primitive model.

They were now in circumstances to do so. The reformation in England had stopped short of the reasonable expectations of its most enlightened friends. It was often stationary, often retrograde. It retained, at its best estate, too many of the habiliments, and by far too much of the spirit, of the popish religion which it had professed to supplant. It was retarded by the habits of the people, which had been formed under Catholic influence. It was involved in numberless controversies. It was entangled with interests of state. It was opposed by the claims of arrogant prerogative, and repressed by arbitrary power. Freedom of thought was "an heinous crime," and liberty of conscience, "an iniquity to be punished by the judges." But the New England puritans were now beyond the action of all these adverse influences. They had come out from among them, and were separate; and with an ocean intervening, and a wilderness about them, there was no impediment to their free inquiries.

In these inquiries the Bible was their guide. The Bible alone. They were not ignorant of history, nor slow to avail themselves of any light which fathers, councils, or reformers, might shed upon their minds ; but they regarded the Bible alone as authoritative. If alone *authoritative*, it must be *sufficient* alone ; and the man of God, possessing the Bible, is, in respect to all that is essential to faith or practice, *perfect, thoroughly furnished* unto all good works. So the Puritans believed and acted. They built their system upon the Bible, and thought the foundation broad enough. They needed no traditions, or inventions of men, or reasons of state, to make it broader. Deeply feeling their responsibility to the God of the Bible, to that law and testimony they constantly referred their own and other men's opinions. "The supreme judge, (say they, in their Platform) by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be *no other*, but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit ; into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved." What a world of confusion and darkness would have been swept away, had all men been as simple in their appeal to the Scriptures as were the Puritans of New England !

Besides their numerous tracts and volumes on the subject of church order, it was abundantly discussed in sermons, and in other forms. The results of these discus-

sions were embodied, generally, in the Cambridge Platform, which was considered and agreed to by a Synod convened at that place, in 1648, and recommended to the acceptance of the churches. This Synod was composed of ministers from all the colonies; the invitation being general, and the interest a common and important one. They also adopted a confession of faith, namely, the Westminster; which had then lately been set forth. For this the Savoy Confession was afterwards substituted.

Having finished their work, in which they had proceeded with great harmony, "they did, with an extraordinary elevation of soul and voice, then sing together the song of Moses and the Lamb, in the fifteenth chapter of Revelation:" and thus the session was closed.

From that time onward, the Cambridge Platform, (till it was superseded in Connecticut, in 1708, by the Saybrook Platform) was the general directory of the Churches. It did not originate, or essentially modify their practice, but rather recognized and digested the principles upon which they were already established. It is an instrument the wisdom of which will be more seen, the more it is studied, and compared with the Scriptures.

The Saybrook Platform is based upon the same general views as the Cambridge; differing from it only, or chiefly, in the further provision it makes in respect to councils, and associations of ministers.

Such, briefly, is the rise and early history of the New England Churches. Of other institutions which have had their origin and growth with these churches, I can take no notice.

It is the habit of infidels and vain persons, and, we must now add, of Catholics, and some others from whom better things might be hoped, to disparage the memory of the Pilgrims,—with what motives, it need not be mentioned. But the attempt is vain. Their works speak for them. Their schools, their colleges, their laws and governments,—to say nothing of their churches,—institutions which all men admire, liberties which all men are breathing after, a state of society which, for its intelligence and morals, has no parallel in any country,—these are their memorials. When our praise of the Pilgrims, or, rather, when our gratitude to God on their behalf, surpasses the benefits received through them; when it rises higher, or spreads farther, than the healthful influences which they originated, then shall our gratitude be abated, and our praise restrained.

There is one reflection which ought to be made, perhaps, in passing, touching the sensitiveness of some, who cannot endure to hear of the puritans being *persecuted*, and that by *bishops*, without conceiving themselves assailed with reproach.

The *facts* cannot be questioned. They cannot be blotted from history. But they are not now to be mentioned to the prejudice of the existing Church

of England, much less, to the reproach of Episcopalians in general. They belong to times which have long since passed away. The odium of them cannot attach to the children, except as they allow the deeds of their fathers, and approve their sayings; and manifest, themselves, the same *exclusive, high-church* spirit which was the cause of persecution in them. It was an exclusive, high-church spirit in Saul of Tarsus, that made him a persecutor; it was an exclusive, high-church spirit in Laud, and his coadjutors; and an exclusive, high-church spirit, in any age, or church, is not far from a persecuting spirit. "There never was a time, (says the venerable John Jay) when high-church doctrines promoted peace on earth and good will among men."*

As it regards the Congregational communion at the present day, its members still cherish, in a good degree, the principles and habits of their fathers. They are still the enlightened friends of liberty and religion; the efficient patrons of education; the advocates, even to a proverb among the licentious, of law, and order, and virtuous morals. If in some degree they have declined from the strictness of former times, it may yet be said, that they are among the *most* strict of the existing denominations. If, as a body, they keep the Sabbath with less exactness, than the fathers did, (a fact to be

* Letter to Trinity Church, New York,—a paper worthy to be read by all Churchmen. See his Life, chap. 12.

deplored) it may still be asked, what body of Christian professors respect it more than they do, or have shown themselves more solicitous to protect it from profanation? If less severe, or strenuous, in their opposition to vice, which of the sister denominations is before them in every work of reform; or against which has the enmity of the profligate been more manifested on this account?

I hope we may never be backward to confess our sins, and to lament our degeneracy. But whatever our sin, or degeneracy, may be, may it never be that of abandoning the principles and habits of our fathers. Return, we beseech thee O God of hosts, look down from heaven, and behold and visit this vine!

We revere the memory of the Pilgrims. We revere their principles. We cherish their institutions. We cannot but love the churches of their planting; not merely, or blindly, because of their origin with them, but because of their scriptural simplicity and tried excellence. We hold fast that which is good. We contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, identical, as we believe, with the faith of these churches; and for its precious fruits, as developed in their influence.

We cannot look at the results of the Congregational system, ecclesiastical and doctrinal, as we behold them in New England, and elsewhere, without feeling that for us to abandon it, would make us culpable as freemen and

philanthropists, as well as degenerate as sons and Christians. If it was an enlightened piety in the fathers which devised the system, must it not be either ignorance or degeneracy in the sons, that discards it? And though we can appreciate, and acknowledge whatever is excellent in other communions, yet, after more than two centuries experience of the fruits of this, unaided as it was, and for a long time unmolested, by other systems, and operating alone in forming the character of New England; we may, without bigotry, we trust, say to such as would proselyte us, or our children, to other modes, brought in to rival, or supplant, the Congregational, "Show us *better fruits*, before we forsake the tree which produces these.*

If this land were now a wilderness, as it was, and the foundations of our welfare were now to be laid, who were the men, or what the principles, which were bet-

* "Let it be recollected, that for nearly a hundred years after the settlement of New England, there were very few of any denomination in the land besides Congregationalists. In 1700, there were in all the New England states then settled, 900 Episcopalians, [equal to one moderate congregation] of whom 185 were communicants. There were no Methodists; and with the exception of Rhode Island, very few Baptists. Not a single church of this denomination existed in Connecticut, and but two or three in Massachusetts. There were at the same time one hundred and twenty Congregational churches, besides thirty churches composed of Indians. It is plain then that New England is, what it is, chiefly from the influence of the Congregationalists, and of Congregational principles." *Hawes*,

ter fitted for the work, than those we are considering? And if these principles are any less valuable now than they once were, if they are less scriptural, or less efficacious, let the system be brought forward, of all the existing systems of faith and order, which is *more* scriptural, and endued with a *greater efficacy* to make men virtuous and happy. “Where is truth, where is piety, where is hope and salvation to be found, if not in these Christian societies, which, for two hundred years, have shared so signally in the protection and care of Almighty God, and which, for the same period, have exerted so happy an influence on all the dearest interests and hopes of this favored community?”* Or if these principles do not now reside in the Congregational communion, if the gold has become utterly dim, and the most fine gold changed, let it be shown in what communion they do reside—and we will be converts to that communion. But if no such church or system can be named, then let the Congregational descendents of the Pilgrims sustain, under God, to the latest times, the faith, and the order, of their Congregational progenitors.

Meantime, we repeat the testimony of the venerable men before quoted,† and hand it down to our children. “We do therefore earnestly testify, (say they) that if any who are given to change, do rise up to unhinge the well established churches in this land, it will be the duty and interest of the churches, to examine, whether the

* Hawes.

† Messrs. Higginson and Hubbard.

men of this trespass, are more prayerful, more watchful, more zealous, more patient, more heavenly, more universally conscientious, and harder students, and better scholars, and more willing to be informed and advised, than those great and good men, who left unto the churches what they now enjoy. If they be not so, it will be wisdom for the children to forbear pulling down with their own hands, the houses of God which were built by their wiser fathers, until they have better satisfaction." And they conclude with their "prayers unto the Lord for these holy churches, [in which, who will not unite ?] that he would surely visit them, and grant much of his gracious presence and Spirit in the midst of them ; and raise up, from time to time, those who may be happy instruments of bringing down the hearts of the parents into the children. The Lord bless these His churches, and keep them *steadfast*, both in the *faith*, and in the *order* of the gospel, and be with them, as he was with their fathers, and never leave them nor forsake them !"

CHAPTER II.

PRINCIPLES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL SYSTEM OF CHURCH ORDER.

As the rights and duties of a church-member are essentially modified by the polity of the church to which he belongs, it is important to him, and also to the church, that he should understand the principles of that polity. The government of a church, like any other government, is a practical thing : it defines relations, distributes powers, prescribes duties. And these vary with the character of the system. It is therefore obvious, that though all believers, considered simply as disciples of Christ, have the same duties to discharge, yet considered as subject to this or that particular ecclesiastical organization, their duties, as well as their privileges, may be quite diverse. As the active duties of the citizen of a republic are not the same as those of the passive subject of an oligarchy ; being more numerous, more responsible, more noble : so, under the various schemes of church order, there is more or less for the laity to do, or to submit to, in the management of affairs, as the schemes have more or less of the character of free institutions.

The following are essential features in the Congregational system. They do not comprise the whole, but include those which are most distinctive. They

relate to the constitution of churches, their members, powers, officers, and relations.

A church is a society of believers, united together, by their own consent, or covenant, in obedience to the will of Christ, for the observance of ordinances, their own edification, and the propagation of the faith. Each society, thus formed, with its proper officers, is to all intents a church.

No persons are to be received as members, but such as are hopefully renewed by the Spirit of God, giving credible evidence of the same.

Church power, as it is called, that is, the power to receive, and to discipline members, to elect officers, and to do such other acts as concern the body, in matters of practice, is vested in the church itself, and not in its officers. The latter have their proper authority and influence, (as will be noticed elsewhere,) but have not power to rule the church, except by consent of the brother-hood.

The officers of the church are of two orders, namely, presbyters (or ministers) and deacons. They are elected by the brethren, and ordained by presbyters.

The churches are, in a qualified sense, independent. No church admits the right of any other church, or number of churches, or church officers, to interfere *authoritatively* with its faith or discipline. They maintain, however, an endeared and extended communion and co-operation with one another ; and are so

far mutually subject to discipline, that an erring church is open to the reproofs of others, and, if the case require, may be disowned from the general communion.

They do not allow the imposition of human creeds, or standards, as tests or orthodoxy, or terms of communion.

The relations of *Church* and *Society*, as they have been established by New England Congregationalists, are, it is believed, peculiar, and eminently happy.

I merely *state* these items, without the *grounds* or *proofs* of them. But for the elucidation of some of them, I subjoin the following remarks.

1. Churches, properly constituted, are *voluntary associations*, being formed by the free consent of the members. They can be properly formed in no other way. Men are not *born* into the church, but into the *world*: though volumes have been written to the contrary. Nor can any act of power, ecclesiastical, or civil; or any parish, or diocesan, or other geographical lines, make them members. It must be by their own intelligent act. The whole business of religion, as it stands in the Bible, is a voluntary thing; and this as well as the rest.

2. It is essential to the due organization of a church, that the members enter into a *covenant*, either express or implied. According to Congregational usage, it is express and written.

The propriety of this is obvious. A number of persons associate together for certain ends which require their faithful co-operation. They therefore pledge themselves to each other so to co-operate ; and as God is concerned in the matter, the covenant has regard to him, as well as to the members.

The practice is abundantly supported by scripture example. For covenanting with God, see Gen. 17. Deut. xxix. 10—13. Exod. xix. 8. Neh. ix. 38, (in which instance the covenant was *written* and *sealed*,) and other passages. For covenanting with one another, see Neh. x. 28—31. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

It also appears from history, that this was the practice of the primitive churches.*

3. Congregationalists hold to the local and separate being of churches, as composed of single societies of believers, in opposition to the idea of an *extended* church, composed of many societies ; as a catholic, a national, or a diocesan church. The New Testament never uses the word *church* in this extended sense, (except as it speaks of the whole family of the redeemed,) but applies it only to local assemblies ; as the church of Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, at Corinth, &c. When it speaks of provinces, or countries, it uses the plural, *churches* ; as the churches of Galatia, of Macedonia, the seven churches which are in Asia, &c.

And this is the Congregational idea. Each society

* See Upham's Rat. Dis. §§29—31.

is a church, a whole church, and not a fraction, or constituent part of a church. It is complete in itself, and competent to all the acts which it is proper for a church to do. Hence, while we hear of The Church of England, The Presbyterian Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, meaning extended bodies, having common and imperative articles of subscription, and amenable to some central, or common power, we never hear of *The Congregational Church*, but they are spoken of as *churches*. Nor do we commonly hear from Congregationalists, such phrases as *our Church*, *our Zion*; or such personifications as *her* communion, *her* pale, and the like. Such imposing phrases and ideas, though there be no great harm in them, perhaps, are as uncongregational as they seem to us unscriptural. In the mouths of some they are unamiably sectarian.

The Congregational communion is not one great imposing consolidated church; but a band of related *Christian families*; bound together by oneness of faith, affection, and aim; having the Bible for their common directory, and Christ for their common head. Such were the New Testament churches.

4. That churches should be composed of those who, in the judgment of charity, are true believers, and of such only, is essential, not only to the purity of churches, but to every object for which they exist. Supposing them to be made up indifferently of believers and unbelievers, the children of God and the chil-

dren of the world, there could be neither fellowship, discipline, co-operation, nor visible separateness from the world. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or what communion hath light with darkness? This is clear enough in scripture, and in reason ; but not every church has acted upon it.

If churches are to be formed carefully and strictly upon this principle, we may see how wrong it is to *invite* the entrance of the unconverted, either by urgency, or by too easy admission. How often have churches sought to enlarge themselves by lowering the terms of admission ; by too large or lax a charity, in respect to evidence of grace ; by extolling the saving efficacy of *their* sacraments, and “ valid ordinances ;” or by the too ready embrace of a merely sectarian and proselyting zeal? How often is “ the temple of God” sinned against, in these and similar ways! “ But let every man take heed how he buildeth.” The apostolic churches were composed of none but those who were hopefully renewed, according to the best evidence that could be had of them. They were all addressed as “ saints,” “ saints in Christ,” saints and faithful.” Our Savior himself offered no facilities for the admission of the impenitent, but discouraged them ; as the Bible everywhere does. Ps. l. 16. Matt. viii. 19, 20. Luke xiv. 26—33. Eccles. v. 5. 1 Cor. iii. 10, 12, 13.

5. As the members are required to have fellowship

one with another, and as there can be no fellowship between those who are brought together without consent, or likeness of character, (for how can two walk together except they be agreed ?) it is manifestly fit and reasonable that new members should come in by consent of the brotherhood.

Again, as the brethren *admit* members, so it is for them to *expel* members, when their conduct requires it. In other words, as it was with them to say whether a person was worthy of their fellowship, at the first ; it is with them to say whether he *continues* worthy, or has forfeited their confidence. That is ; the power of admission, and of discipline, is properly in the brotherhood. Suppose it to be elsewhere, and to be exercised independently of them : it may force an unworthy and unwelcome member upon them, but it cannot force their confidence and love. He may be *among* them, but he is not *of* them.

6. If the right of admitting and excluding *members* be important to the brotherhood, much more is the right of choosing their own *ministers*. My edification, as dependent on my minister ; the love and respect I am required to bear towards him ; my concern for my children and friends, and for all who are to share with me in the influence of his ministrations ; and many other things, make it exceedingly desirable to me, that I should have a voice in his election.

Nor let it be said that the brethren are not *qualified*

for such a trust. Our Savior virtually judges otherwise, where he says, the sheep know the shepherd's voice, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him ; for they know not the voice of strangers. True Christians soon discern the spirit of their ministers ; and are made to feel what occasion they have in them either to rejoice, or to mourn. Blind guides may satisfy the blind, but not the " children of the day."

" Of such moment is the preservation of this power, [of choosing their officers] that the churches exercised it in the presence of the apostles."* Acts xiv. 23,† and vi. 3—5.

7. Of church officers we have but two kinds, because but two are recognized in the New Testament. But two kinds recognized, I mean, of *permanent* officers,—ministers and deacons. The *apostolic* office was not a permanent one, but expired with the twelve.

The words *bishop*, *elder*, *pastor*, and *minister*, are used in the New Testament to signify the same office, being applied to the same person. Hence the equality of ministers. It was not intended that some should be set up as overseers and lords over the others. " Be not ye called Rabbi : for one is your Master, even Christ ; and all ye are brethren." " Ye know that they which

* Camb. Plat.

† This passage reads in our translation, " they *ordained*," &c. but the word in the original, means to *elect by lifting up the hand*. See Robinson's Lex. verb. χειροτονέω.

are accounted to rule over the gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so it shall not be among you."

The three grades of bishops, priests, and deacons, are not to be found in the New Testament. The chapter and verse cannot be named. Of course, as they are not in the Bible, they are not of *divine right*, whatever may be said for them from history or expediency.

Lay-presbyters, or ruling elders, are supposed, by Presbyterians, to be authorized by 1 Tim. v. 17. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine." But it is thought by very judicious critics that they have misapprehended the meaning of the passage. Let the elders (ministers) who rule well, especially those who are laborious in preaching, be counted worthy of double honor. Compare with 1 Thess. v. 12, 13, and Heb. xiii. 17. Reference is also made, in support of the office, to Rom. xii. 7, 8. and 1 Cor. xii. 28. These passages speak of *ruling*, and of *helps* and *governments*, but specify nothing as to a government by ruling elders.* The *expediency*, or lawfulness, of this

* "This distinction between *teaching* and *ruling* elders, if it ever existed, (which I will neither affirm nor deny,) was certainly not of long continuance; for St. Paul makes it a qualification requisite in *all* presbyters, or bishops, that they be able to teach and instruct others. 1 Tim. iii. 2, &c.—Mosheim, Bk. I.

method of government, is a separate question, which every one will settle for himself.

8. From our having no public Articles of religion to which we require subscription, it is sometimes objected to us, that we are a "church without a creed!"—as if that were some grievous thing. But in this we are like the primitive churches. They had no confession, symbol, standard, or formulary whatever, that we are informed of, except the Bible. We have no other, and think that we need no other. We think that the Bible contains, in the form of express statute or recorded practice, not only all that is essential to the faith of churches, but all that is requisite to order and discipline; and that its instructions are sufficiently ascertainable without the medium of a human compend.

If it be supposed, from our having no standards, that we have therefore no distinctness or harmony of belief, or practice; or that our sentiments are uncertain, and not to be known; the supposition is a very mistaken one. The sentiments of no denomination are more widely or distinctly known,—gathered, it is true, not from Articles, numbered and stereotyped; but from the living pulpit, from lucid and laborious authors, and from thousands of tracts and periodicals. And the *harmony* of our churches has been proverbial. Notwithstanding their perfect and universal freedom, as to what they shall believe or practice, being bound by no creeds or canons, there has been a remarkable agreement both of faith and

practice among them, and a prevailing likeness of character, throughout New England; and for above two centuries. What churches have dwelt together in greater affection and unity? In what body of Christians have there been fewer defections from the faith? And not only here, but wherever the denomination is known. The following testimony of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, respecting the denomination in that country, may stand for all. "They wish it to be observed, (they say,) that notwithstanding their jealousy of subscription to Creeds and Articles, and their general disapproval of the imposition of any human standard, they are far more agreed in their doctrines and practices, than any church which enjoins subscription, and enforces a human standard of orthodoxy."

Whatever may be said of the utility of creeds, we have, in the history of these churches, a practical demonstration that they are at least not *indispensable*, either to the being or well-being of churches.

There can be no objection to creeds, that is, to compends of doctrine, for certain purposes. They have their uses, and perhaps excellent uses. But Congregationalists object to their being imposed as *tests*, or set up as standards, to enforce uniformity. We deprecate the authority they are apt to grow to, to the prejudice of the rights of conscience, and of the word of God. As fences against heresy, experience does not prove them to be very effectual. As articles of peace, and bonds of union, we fear they *create* divisions as often as

they prevent them. How large a proportion of the internal troubles of churches which use them,—their “Acts and Testimonies,” their protests and counter-protests, their trials of good men and books for heresy, and the like; arise from nothing else than zeal for standards? Such instruments are apt to become, in the hands of the narrow minded, instruments of power, wherewith to harrass the liberal. There are some who think that heaven and earth should pass sooner, than one jot, or one tittle, of the exact wording of the prescribed creed and order of their church be not fulfilled; and any brother that offends in one point, they hold to be guilty of all, and obnoxious to ecclesiastical censure. They put their strait-jacket upon the limbs of Charity, who loves freedom as she loves truth, and make their narrow views the jail limits, within which she walks afflicted and confined.

It is not my design to discuss the subject of creeds at all, or to begin to wade in those troubled waters; but I can hardly help expressing a conviction, that the tendency of creeds, especially when enforced to the letter, is just the other way from that which is claimed for them. As to the entire uniformity which is aimed at by means of them, this is not attainable, as all experience shows. And if the end itself be not attainable, still less is it attainable by the *means* relied on. The attempt to *force* an agreement is likely to result in the opposite. Agreement, so far as it is attainable, must be voluntary and unconstrained. The human conscience,

made free by its Creator, revolts at the idea of bondage to any human authority. This reluctance is in none stronger than in the truest sons of the gospel; who have an injunction from their Lord, to call no man Father upon earth; for one is their Father, which is in heaven, and one is their Master, even Christ; and an apostolic exhortation to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free,—having reference to this very subject, the imposition of a creed; namely, that of the Jews, upon the Galatian converts. The tendency of religion itself is, to liberate the conscience from mere human authority, (viewed *as such*,) and to subject it to God alone.

With regard to the Westminster and Savoy Confessions, which were formally adopted by the early New England churches, and are still esteemed by us, as systems of truth, they have never had the authority of *standards* with us, as some have supposed. They originated in England. They were consented to, “for substance of doctrine,” by the New England churches, instead of drawing up a confession for themselves, (which they have never done,) for the sake of declaring their doctrinal agreement with Christians on the other side of the water;—who with all their disputes about church order, were remarkably agreed, in the main, in respect to theology,—Churchmen, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists; as their several confessions show.

But these confessions, were never to my knowledge, set up as standards, and made of the like authority

with us, as confessions are with other communions. No candidate for the ministry is required to subscribe them, *ex animo*, or otherwise; no church adopts them for its private use; nor is reference ever made to them, so far as I know, in cases of discipline for heresy; nor is it probable that Congregationalists generally would subscribe, without reserve, or modification, to every thing which they contain. They can no otherwise claim to be our standards than the XXXIX Articles of the Church of England can; for those Articles were regarded by our fathers as exhibiting the same doctrinal views as the confessions in question, and were owned and consented to in the same manner.* Indeed, they regarded that very creed as their own, and knew no other, it is believed, previous to the synod of 1648. All these confessions, have the authority of *truth*, with us, so far as they are believed to agree with the Bible;—and it is believed, that, regarded as *systems*, though there be exceptions to some of their particular statements, they are

* See Heads of Agreement, appended to the Saybrook Platform, Article VIII. See, also, Preface to the confession by the Cambridge Synod, where they say it was not on account of any *doctrinal* disagreement with the Church of England that caused their separation. It must not, however, be supposed that the dominant party in that church *received* those Articles in the true spirit and import of them. Far from it. They were men of other views than those of the men they persecuted. "My lords," said a British statesman in Parliament, "we have a Calvinistic creed, an Arminian clergy, and a Popish liturgy."

far nearer to "the faithful word," than the loose Arminian systems which stand opposed to them. They have no other authority than this. And the same may be said of our *Platforms*. They are lights which all are free to use, or not, as they please.

9. The things which most distinguish the Congregational plan from others, are these two: the importance it gives to the suffrages of the brotherhood, in matters of discipline, and government; and the independence of the churches of foreign control, or supervision: which two things may be stated in one, namely, the *the self-government* of the churches. In other systems the powers of government are vested in the officers, chiefly in the clergy, exclusive of the brotherhood. In the Congregational, they are vested in the church as a body, including its officers; the latter acting, in their official capacity, as the guides and executives of the church.

These powers are vested thus in the church,

1st. Because it was so done in the New Testament Churches, as our references to the Scriptures show. Our Savior himself gives such power to the churches. Mat. xviii. 17, 18.*

* To the independence and self-government of the primitive churches, we have the testimony of Mosheim. "In those primitive times, (says that respected historian,) each Christian church was composed of the people, the presiding officers, and the assistants, or deacons.—The highest authority was in the

2dly. It would seem to be the *natural right* of the churches, as voluntary societies, to govern themselves, —unless this right is denied them in the New Testament ; which is not done, but on the contrary, the right is there confirmed to them, as has been shown. The exercise of this right is also *necessary* to the due per-

people, or the whole body of Christians ; for even the apostles themselves inculcated by their example, that nothing of any moment was to be done or determined on, but with the knowledge and consent of the brotherhood. Acts i. 15 : vi. 3 : xv. 4 : xxi. 22.” —“ The assembled people, therefore, elected their own rulers and teachers, or by their authoritative consent received them, when nominated to them. They also by their suffrages rejected or confirmed the laws, that were proposed by their rulers, in their assemblies ; they excluded profligate and lapsed brethren, and restored them ; they decided the controversies and disputes that arose ; &c.” And this order of things, the same historian finds to have continued for near two centuries. “ During a great part of this [the second] century all the churches continued to be, as at first, *independent* of each other, or were connected by no consociations or confederations. Each church was a kind of little independent republic, governed by its own laws, which were enacted, or at least sanctioned, by the people.” —Dr. Murdock’s Edition, 1832, Vol. I. pp. 81, 82, 86.

Mosheim has, of course, no reference in these passages to modern Congregationalism, but has his eye simply upon the primitive churches, and the matters of fact concerning them. There can be no doubt that he has exhibited them as they were, the same being evident from the New Testament itself ; and the description exactly answers to our Congregational system.

formance of duties which are enjoined upon the body, those namely, of watchfulness and discipline ; which cannot be performed, and, in point of fact, *are not* performed, at least according to the intent and letter of them, in churches whose government is aristocratic, as may be noticed hereafter.

3dly. The powers in question are no less *safely*, than they are scripturally, confided to the brotherhood. It is believed that the churches, with their pastors, are competent to the maintenance of their own purity, peace, and order, according to the laws of Christ ; and that the powers requisite to this are likely to be used as conscientiously and judiciously, and are as little liable to abuse or neglect, in their hands, as in the hands of church officers alone. Power in the hands of a few, in a hierarchy particularly, (such is the nature of man) is prone to be consequential and dictatorial. It delights in the show and exercise of authority, and in the submissive reverence of its subjects ; and too often has its own importance and preservation in view, not less than the interests for which it professes to legislate. I do not aver that it always assumes this bearing, actually, but such is its *tendency*, as there is too much melancholly history to show,—though I am happy to know that protestant churches have often, perhaps I ought to say *generally*, been governed, under aristocratic forms, with a pious regard to the will of God and the good of the people. But, still, how many have been the abuses of these forms of government ! How many their neg-

lects ! How often have high church prerogatives and powers—lordly in nature, name, and exercise ; and aspired to by improper men, if they have not spoiled the simplicity of good men—been exerted in ways immensely injurious to religion,—immensely foreign to its nature and interests as a spiritual thing, and oppressive and distressing to the most conscientious of its subjects ; and how often, also, have they been negligent and indifferent where corruption and disorders, doctrinal and moral, have demanded their exercise !

The government of the churches vested in themselves, is a very different thing from a government solely by officers. From its nature here, it is incapable of ostentation or aggrandizement, or of far-reaching abuses. Its exercise, in the hands of the brotherhood, is the humble discharge of duties, where all are alike responsible, and alike concerned in the consequences ; where the power of each, if any be disposed to use it improperly, is balanced by the equal voice and vote of the others ; and where, in cases of censure, particularly, each is reminded to do what he does, “ in the spirit of meekness ; considering himself, lest he also be tempted.” There may be in a reverend assembly of divines, or house of bishops, or other formal legislative or judicial body, more learning and gravity, but there is not always more simplicity and prayerfulness, than in the humble *church meeting* ; whose very want of the consequence which learning and office give, makes them the more self distrustful and circumspect, in what they

do, and the more disposed, in their lack of wisdom, to ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.

4thly. The *discipline* of the church is a different thing in the hands of the church, from what it is in merely official hands. It is another and a *better* thing.

In the first place, we want the *aid* of the brotherhood in our endeavors to *reclaim* offenders. A member will often deal with a fellow-member,—a plain man with a plain man—more hopefully than a bishop, or any other church officer can. They are better acquainted, and understand each other better; and have more that is common between them, of language and sympathy. This is precisely the means which Christ has appointed in his rule, in the xviiith of Matthew. He does not direct the pastor, rector, or session, to take the offender in hand, immediately; but a *brother* is to deal with him, in the first instance alone; then with one or two others; and then the church as a body. At the same time, the pastor may use his influence in addition to theirs. The benefit of this method is such, and so obvious, that I think that those who know what it is by *experience*, will not willingly exchange it for others.

Again, the *censures* of the church are more effectual, proceeding from the brotherhood. They are another thing in their *nature*, and another thing in their *efficacy*. A censure proceeding from the *authority* of a church officer, or church judicatory, is an *official act*, and is felt to be no more than this by the subject of it: but pro-

ceeding from the brotherhood, the equals and associates of the offender, it has the nature of *public opinion*, and falls, as such, with peculiar force upon his spirit. It is so felt by him, and by the church; it is so regarded by "them that are without;" and I doubt not that such it was intended to be, by him who instituted the discipline. 'But ye brethren, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be *ashamed*.' The shame arises from his having forfeited the Christian esteem, and consequently the fellowship, of the society which had received him. He is disowned—stricken from their list. It is evidently the design of our Savior, in the result to which he brings us, in his rule, and of much else that is said on discipline, in the New Testament, to place the offender, not under the simple ban of official *authority*, but,—which is much more painful and subduing,—in the strong light of an unfavorable *opinion*, expressed by the voice of the society towards him, "as an heathen man and a publican," and one not to be companied with as a Christian. And so, on the other hand, if the delinquent be *restored*, it is the same popular voice, or opinion, that restores him. It is that which alone *can* restore him, in reality; for the good opinion of the society is that to which he is *to be* restored, and not merely to a "*name* to live." An act of power may restore him to his place in *form* merely, but cannot restore him to confidence and esteem: without which his restoration is a nullity.

This, then, is the peculiar efficacy of the Congrega-

tional method of discipline. It lies in the expressed opinion of the brotherhood. It lies there, I mean, so far as its efficacy is derived at all *from men*. Of course the offender is to be sensible that he has broken the laws of Christ, and done dishonor to religion ; and from that source chiefly his compunctions should arise.

And how much is discipline worth, where such is *not* its efficacy ? How much is it ever worth, as to its moral effect, if it do not come to this,—if it be not sustained by the voice of the church, as a body ? How much effect will the bare decision of a judge, or a bench of judges, have upon the mind of a citizen, so long as he is sustained under it by the popular voice and sympathy ? And how much salutary moral effect did all the pompous solemnities, mulcts, imprisonments, penances, or anathemas, ever have, that have proceeded merely from mitred *authority*, and commissioned *power*,—independently of the voice of the people ?

If the efficacy of discipline must, after all, then, depend on the opinion of the brotherhood, why not come to that *directly*, and *surely*, as we do in our Congregational way ? The Congregational system “ arrives by a direct road, at the point which other modes, [if they reach it at all,] reach circuitously, and by implication. It speaks the voice of the church, and always speaks just as the church thinks. It is an expression of the sentiments and convictions of the whole body. As such, it has a force in honoring Christ’s laws, and in rousing the conscience of an offender, which other modes have

vainly essayed to obtain by imposing forms, solemn warnings, and dreadful denunciations.”*

The *independence* of the churches is a necessary part of their self-government. Their powers become a nullity if they resign themselves to a superior jurisdiction. If they are not competent to determine ultimately for themselves, if their doings either want confirming, or are liable to reversal, by a higher power, they are virtually void.

Our Savior himself gives this ultimate power to the church, Matt. xviii. 17, 18. He does not say, If the offending member neglect to hear the church, let the case be carried up to some higher tribunal; but the case is to be terminated there.

And while this ultimate power of deciding, in cases of discipline particularly, is important to the fellowship of the members, (for how can they have fellowship with a member whom they are forced to retain against their consent?) I, for one, am persuaded, that cases generally can be determined better by the church, than by any other tribunal. The church where the case arises is best acquainted with the facts and parties; and it is not difficult to conceive, that acting under a solemn sense of their responsibility as the ultimate judges, they will act more cautiously and judiciously, than if acting under the impression, that if they commit an error, there is

* Ch. Spect. 1831.

another tribunal to revise and correct their doings. And in addition to this, there is an advantage in the comparative *privacy* and *dispatch*, which is secured by this method. A matter is settled sooner, and with less publicity, when it is settled within the church, than when it is carried abroad, by one remove and another. It cannot be carried abroad thus, without extending, more or less, its agitating effects, and its unpleasant notoriety. Settled at *home*, it is comparatively hidden and confined. Settled in a public judicatory, it is heard in its discussions, and reported on its journals; so that that which was done in a corner is proclaimed upon the house-tops. Why not apply our Savior's rule to churches, as well as to members? Let their private difficulties be settled in private, as far as they may.

I do not mean that cases should never be carried beyond the church in which they originate; but it should be done for advice, rather than adjudication, and the more seldom it is done the better. It may look well in theory, to provide for a succession of appeals,—it may look like a scrupulous regard to justice,—but I cannot help thinking it an evil in fact. We know how it is in civil litigation. The parties, because they may, are disposed to carry their causes from one bench up to another, till they come to the last; and will never be satisfied that justice is done them, so long as there is a higher court to review the decisions of the lower; nor are satisfied then, any better than at the first, if they are satisfied as well; while the community at large, from seeing the case

so long and successively debated, are not unlikely to be impressed with a belief that the case is complicated, and justice doubtful.

The early Congregationalists of New England were very tenacious of the self-government of the churches; as their descendants, generally, and those of England, are now. I will not enlarge on the subject farther than to observe, that the wisdom of our fathers in this particular, as in many others, receives increasing confirmation from year to year. It is more and more a matter of experience, that church difficulties are soonest and most satisfactorily healed by the churches themselves; and that when it is necessary to go to a council, *persuasion* is better than *authority*; that is, an advisory council, which is the Congregational mode, is better than an ecclesiastical judicatory, or other law-dispensing power.

If this be so, the question naturally arises, Have the sons of New England been doing well, in neglecting, as they have, the approved wisdom of their fathers, in rearing up so many churches, in new settlements, on another plan than theirs? * If *they* deemed the Con-

* It is computed that 400 churches, or more, have been gathered in the west for the *Presbyterian* church by the benevolence of Connecticut alone. The men and means were furnished here, and sent out chiefly by the Connecticut Missionary Society. And I have seen it stated, by high Presbyterian authority, that not less than *fifteen hundred* of their churches are essentially Congregational in their origin and habits. A high compliment both to the zeal and liberality of New England men.

gregational plan worth all that it cost them, is it not worth preserving and extending by us, among their emigrant descendants in the West and South? Its fruits *here* are confessed to be excellent: is it not worth as much there as here? Would not its fruits be as valuable upon the lakes and streams of the West, as they are upon the shores and rivers of the East? Will not the vine bear transplanting from the comparatively barren soil of New England, to the rich bottoms of the great Valley?

Finally; It is no small argument in favor of this whole system of polity, that it is eminently adapted to make *practical* men. Though the position be admitted, which has been so commonly admitted in ecclesiastical controversies, that there is no prescribed form of church order in the New Testament, a position which I am not disposed to meddle with;—though I cannot but observe that the New Testament gives us *precedents*: for the New Testament churches certainly had *some* order, and it is obvious what it was; whether it was intended to be always *obligatory*, or not:—if the position, I say, be admitted, still there is a principle which, plainly, ought to guide us in the framing of our systems; which is this. *The ends of church order must be the same as the ends of truth itself.* It must have been the divine intention

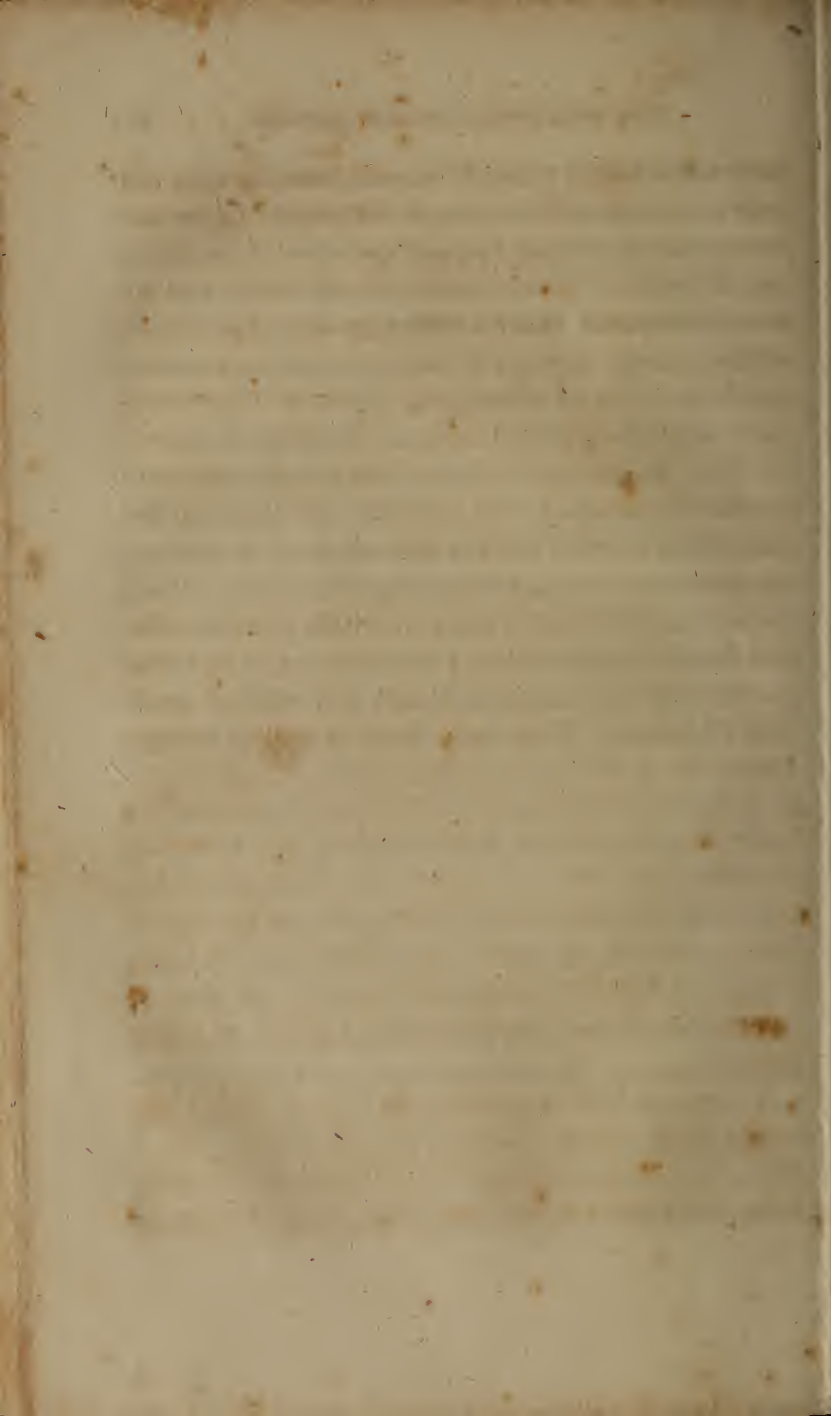
Add these 1500 churches which are Congregational in spirit to those which are such in form, and there is not in the world a more intelligent, efficient, and pious body of Christians.

that they should conspire together to one result; the latter as ancillary to the former. Whatever the system be, therefore, which we adopt, it should be such as to concur with and promote those ends of truth; and that is the best system which does this most effectually: so that admitting that the New Testament does prescribe no order, it does not follow from this, that it is a matter of indifference what our order is, and that we have unqualified liberty to devise what system we will.

What then are the ends of religious truth? They are, first, to make men *pious*; secondly, to make them *useful*. First, *piety*, then *activity*, (or *zeal*,) directed by *knowledge*, in the cause of Christ. That is, the ends of truth are, in a word, to make *practical Christians*:—with a view of course—that I be not accused, in these theologically captious times, of making too narrow an account of the matter—with a view, of course, to the glory of God, their own salvation, and the good of men. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear *much fruit*.”

Now this the Congregational system eminently does. It makes practical Christians. While other systems exclude the laity from ecclesiastical affairs, altogether, or in a great degree, regarding them only as worshipers and tax-payers, the Congregational churches devolve upon their members the responsible duties of discipline and government. They are thus called habitually to act together. Their wisdom and piety are habitually put in exercise; and by this means are necessarily increased.

Each church is a school of mutual instruction in the great principles and precepts of the gospel; where the younger are benefitted by the experience of the older, and all by the collected wisdom of the body, and by that of the pastor, their common guide. And the result is strikingly obvious, in the known practical character of this body of Christians. Look at their movements in all the practical concerns of religious and social life. Look at their colleges, and schools, and other institutions, designed and sustained by them, for the good of the world. Look at their efficiency in missionary operations, and in all movements of reform. They are not merely devout worshipers within church walls, and decent people without; but, notoriously and eminently, they are intelligent, liberal, and efficient *business* Christians. They *serve* God, as well as worship Him.



CHAPTER III.

CHURCH COVENANT AND WATCH.

HAVING looked at the *principles* of these churches, we proceed to their *practice*. The duties of church membership will of course be prominent, but much, also, will appear, in the chapters which follow, which will concern the congregation at large.

On becoming members of the church, besides professing our *faith*, we enter into a *covenant*. This covenant is, first, with God; and embraces the duties of piety towards him: secondly, with the members; with whom we engage to live in Christian affection and harmony; to walk with them in a due observance of ordinances; to watch over them in faithfulness and love, expecting the same from them; to support the discipline of the church, and to submit to the same; and, in general, to observe and do all which the interests of the body, and of the members, may justly require of us, and to refrain from all which may reasonably grieve, or injure them.

To *love the brethren*, next to the love of God, is first among these duties. Love is the soul of all. But I pass over whatever pertains to the religion of the *affections*, and confine myself, according to my design, to

the *practical concerns* of the religious social state. The first which I shall mention is, the

MUTUAL WATCH OF THE MEMBERS.

We covenant together to watch over each other's infirmities and errors; to observe each other with the eye of Christian affection and concern, and to give and receive reproof, as occasion may require.

Any member knowing of any thing in another, which is inconsistent with his character or hopes as a Christian, whether it be some impropriety of behavior, error of faith, or neglect of duty, is bound to notice it in a way of friendly admonition; or to take such other measures as he may conceive to be best suited to his amendment. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one." "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." This was a law of the Jewish church, as well as of the Christian. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him."*

Positive faults are the first objects of this duty; but besides these, we are bound to notice the *danger* a brother may be in, of committing a fault. If we see him *exposed* to fall,—heedless of the pit that is before him, or parleying with the enemy,—we do wrong to wait till he actually falls, before we admonish him.

* Gal. vi. 1; Luke xvii. 3; Levit. xix. 17.

There are those who, through their peculiar weaknesses or temptations, are ready to fall, and that daily, into “the sin which doth so easily beset” them, and need our kind preventive vigilance. Insensible of the approach of temptation, or too weak to resist it, how kind then, how salutary, the faithful voice of the brother, who, true to the trust which he has assumed and given, comes once and often, as the case may require, to waken, strengthen, and recall them ! It was such a duty as this, that Jesus enjoined on Peter : *And when thou art converted*,—that is, after thy fall and recovery, in the matter of denying Christ,—*strengthen thy brethren*. The same is enjoined on all. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right.”*

I think, too, that that general state of *coldness*, or declension in religious feeling, into which all are too apt to fall, is within the province of this duty. If we see some “waxing cold ;” falling off from the accustomed prayer meeting ; no more speaking out of the abundance of the heart, of the things of the kingdom ; “sunk down with sleep ;” it is incumbent on us, I do not say to *rebuke* them, but affectionately to “stir them up by

* Luke xxii. 32 ; Gal. vi. 2 ; Heb. xii. 15, 16.

putting them in remembrance.” “But ye, brethren, (should we say to these drowsy ones,) are the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”*

The *spirit and manner* in which this duty should be performed, should be always kind and brotherly,—as far as possible from harshness and reproach. There is no occasion for reproof being otherwise than both kindly given and kindly received; for it is in reality a kindly act.

Our manner should be frank and unembarrassed; as though we were conscious of both doing our duty and acting the part of a friend. Reproof, in itself unpleasant enough, is more disagreeable when it is administered in a timid, suspicious, half uttered expression and demeanor; and is positively offensive if it be done unfeelingly, or angrily.

We should be faithful in this duty; but at the same

* 1 Thess. v. 4—10.

time it will be well to remember, that a merely *meddlesome*, or *fault-finding* habit, is no part of the proper performance of it. There will be serious occasions enough to require our faithfulness, without our seeking them in the lawful affairs of our neighbors, or in those mere infirmities which are common to the flesh.

I need not remark that it is as much our duty to *receive* reproof as to *give* it. He who *resents* and *rejects* reproof, when justly and kindly given, violates his covenant, and wrongs his brother. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed."

This mutual watch of the brotherhood is of much importance. It is one of the excellent benefits of church union; and is valued as such by every truly spiritual member. "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

The faithful performance of this duty has no tendency to promote disgusts and alienations, as some may imagine; but on the contrary, as it is one of the best proofs of love and confidence in brethren, so it tends to produce and confirm those affections.

The men of the world are under each other's watch, as truly as the church; but in another manner. It is not because they have mutually pledged themselves to do so,—though God has made it as much their duty as

ours ; it is not to prevent or recover each other from sin ; but the prophet describes it, thus : “ All my familiars watched for my *halting*.”

There are two things which show how little of true benevolent interest there is among mankind for one another. One is, that there is so little salutary, friendly *reproof* among them ; and the other, that there is so much *evil speaking*. Many will abstain from *reproving* a neighbor, which is the kindest office of friendship ; and at the same time, will go up and down *proclaiming his errors*, which is the unkindest office of an enemy. “ I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it.” Let it never be so in the church.

It was ever a characteristic of the best men, that they were faithful reprovers. Such were the prophets and apostles, and such, above all, was our Savior. On the other hand, the most wicked men are ever indifferent to the sins of others. They say it is not *their* business to look after their neighbors ; and they demand, with Cain, “ Am I my brother’s keeper ?”

It is one of the important effects of this mutual watch of the members, that it is a great preventive of church discipline. Most of the grosser sins committed by members, are preceded by lesser, but obvious departures from the ways of God ; and if the unhappy wanderer had been affectionately admonished at the first stages of his delinquency,—take the intemperate for example,—it

might have saved not only him from a grievous fall, but the church itself from the dishonor and grief of a case of discipline.

There is more hope of reclaiming a brother at the first stages of his sin, then when it is aggravated. He has then more character and conscience, and less infirmity and blindness; and the private labors of his brethren, which then are proper, are more winning, probably, than the open and formidable dealing which afterwards is necessary. Let alone till the church takes up his case, he is not unlikely to regard its formal procedure, as an organized persecution, a regular setting to work to effect his disgrace; which is a state of mind in the last degree unfavorable to his reformation. The case, at first curable, is become desperate before it is meddled with; and is so regarded, probably, both by the church and by him. Taken up late and reluctantly by the former, it is resisted, or sullenly submitted to, by the latter; and ends as both anticipate.

Our discipline, in too many instances, *begins too late!* too late for the claims of duty, and too late for the ends of discipline. The pledge of the members to watch over the offender have been culpably neglected; and this neglect, though it be no justification, or, perhaps, mitigation, of his sin, belongs to its history, and makes them accessory to a brother's ruin.

To conclude; I cannot but think that this duty of watchfulness and reproof, so necessary, so naturally un-

pleasant to discharge, so much neglected, is peculiarly pleasing to God, and that it will be peculiarly rewarded.

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all;” and remember that you are bound to this, by Christ’s command, and by your solemn covenant.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

THE ends of discipline in the church are,

1. The reclaiming of such as fall into sin. "Restore such an one." "That the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Gal vi. 1. 1 Cor. v. 5.

2. The preventing of sin in others. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." 1 Tim. v. 20.

3. The purity of the church. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are [profess to be] unleavened;" that is, cast out iniquity, that ye may be a pure society, as ye profess to be. "For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." 1 Cor. v. 6, 7; and iii. 17.

4. The character of the church and the honor of religion in the view of the world. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Matt. v. 13.

5. The preventing the divine displeasure. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." 1 Cor. xi. 29—32.

These *ends* of discipline show its *importance*. But of this I shall speak hereafter.

The *means* of discipline are private persuasion and reproof, admonition before the church, suspension, and exclusion from its communion. No other pains or penalties whatever, such as fines, penances, imprecations, (such as the Catholics use) and the like, are allowable. The New Testament knows nothing of them. The discipline it inculcates is wholly of a corrective and moral kind, and not punitive.

Cases requiring discipline are commonly mentioned under two classes; namely, *private* offences, and *public* offences.

PRIVATE OFFENCES.

Private offences are those which are of a strictly private nature, committed by one member against another; and which being not known to the world, or not publicly scandalous, are such as may be settled in a private way.

The rule respecting this kind of offences is thus laid down by Christ.

“If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may

be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. xviii. 15—18.

This rule is so plain that it scarcely needs comment. Here are *three steps* to be taken; each successive one being necessary only in case of the failure of the preceding one.

If a fellow member has injured you, your first duty is to *go and tell him his fault in private*, and endeavor, in Christian sincerity and faithfulness, to bring him to a just sense and acknowledgment of it. Tell *him* his fault. Not that you are in no case to mention it to others. This may be necessary for inquiry, or advice. But to make it a matter of your open talk, or censure, is contrary to the precept, and tends to embarrass and defeat the interview.

If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; you have recovered him from his error; and have attached him to yourself, more strongly, perhaps, than he was before; for these scenes of ingenuous acknowledgment and forgiveness between brethren, have an effect mutually to reveal character, inspire confidence, and cement affection. If he acknowledge his fault and is sorry for it, the matter is ended. You are thenceforth to remember it only to love him the more for the ingenu-

ous Christian feeling which prevailed with him, (so contrary to human nature,) to confess and regret his error ; and to quicken the feeling of your own infirmities and sins, which daily need the forgiveness of your heavenly Father, if not also of your fellow men. Let there be no unchristian harshness, triumph, or contempt, at the time of the interview, nor coldness afterwards. Thou hast *gained thy brother*: let that suffice.

But if he refuse to listen to you, you are then to take the *second* step. "*Then take with thee one or two more, &c.*" Let the brethren chosen for this purpose, be of good judgment, of acknowledged piety, and not reasonably objectionable to the offending brother. If their endeavors joined with yours prove unsuccessful, it then remains to *tell it to the church*. This done, your duty is discharged.

As to the manner of laying it before the church, it is generally expected, I believe, that the complaining brother will do it in person ; but if he feels incompetent to this, there is no objection to his doing it through a judicious brother, or through the pastor.* He should do it, not in the spirit and manner of an *accuser*, but with modesty and regret, as becomes a brother.

Being brought before the church, it becomes its duty, in the presence of the parties, with all patience and candor, to hear and judge the case. If the accused be found truly charged with the fault, and still refuse sat-

* Camb. Plat. Chap. xiv. § 2.

elation, it will be the duty of the church, after due means used, to exclude him from its communion: *Let him be as an heathen man and a publican*; and our Savior declares, (verse 18,) that heaven will confirm its decision.

“Of these just and gentle proceedings, (say Dr. Dwight,) the final sentence of excommunication is a proper close, and is perfectly fitted to reform an obstinate brother. He who will not be won by the mild measures of tenderness, will never feel either his character or condition but by dint of distress. Should he continue obstinate in this situation; the church will be freed from a spot on its reputation; an obstacle to its communion: and a nuisance to the religion which it professes. At the same time, the spirit with which every part of this discipline is to be administered, and without which it exists in form only, precludes every reasonable fear of haste, injustice, or severity.”

I must dismiss this class of offences with two or three remarks.

1. With regard to the *offence*. It must be a real and serious fault, and not an imaginary one. Things of ordinary occurrence, and such as result from the common imperfection of our nature, ought not to interrupt the fellowship of brethren, much less, to occupy the church.

2. With regard to the *offending member*, let it be observed that his refusing to give satisfaction is a new and

distinct offence at each step of the process ; and especially the last,—compared with which, the original offence may be a thing of minor importance. The original fault was an injury, and perhaps not a very grievous one, to a private individual. But his subsequent conduct with regard to it, is a settled disregard of private justice, the voice of the church, and the authority of Christ. Nor let it be said that he is excommunicated for that private offence alone. It is for the whole proceeding ; and especially for his last act, in obstinately refusing to hear the church. It is his neglecting to “hear the church,” more, apparently, than for his private offence, that our Savior requires his excommunication. For by this last act of perverseness, this pertinacious, if not contemptuous, disregard of the sentiments and christian endeavors of the brotherhood, he shows himself no longer worthy, nor indeed capable, of their communion.

If the offending member refuse to appear before the church, being duly notified, he of course refuses to hear the church, and the church must proceed accordingly.

It may be also observed here, that the offender ought to forestall this whole process, by going of himself to the injured party. Mat. v. 23, 24.

3. With regard to the *member aggrieved*, it should be remembered that his duty is *explicit* and *imperative*. He is not at liberty to neglect the course prescribed, nor to substitute some other ; but is bound to take the pre-

cise steps, and all of them, should it be necessary, which the rule requires.

You may say, if your brother has injured you, it is his duty to come *to you* and acknowledge it. And this is true; it *is* his duty; but if he does not do so, it is yours to go to him. This is the direction, this is your duty; and I do not know that our Saviour would have you wait a day for the other,—he does not intimate that he would,—before you go to perform it.

You may say, again, that you would rather put up with the injury, or pass it over, than be at the trouble of such a process. But *this* you are not allowed to do, it appears; for you must remember that your offending *brother* is concerned in the thing, as well as you, and *more* than you; for it is a greater calamity to have done the wrong, than to have suffered it. You may be willing to bear the injury in silence; but may you suffer the sin upon *him*? He has done a thing which he ought to repent of; and *must* repent of, to be forgiven of God. Not only his character as a Christian, but his *hopes* as a Christian, demand this of him: and you are the person best fitted by the circumstances, as being concerned in the injury, and specially required by Christ, to endeavor to bring him to such repentance. You owe this to *him*. You owe it to the *church*; the sins of whose members you are not at liberty to be indifferent to in any case, and particularly in this. And you owe it to *yourself*; for your feelings can hardly be right to sit

down with this brother, nor his towards you, probably, till the fault is acknowledged, and confidence restored.

4. The duty of the *church* is likewise explicit and imperative. It is bound to receive the complaint when regularly brought before it; and to dispose of it according to the will of Christ.

Such is our Savior's rule. And let us observe how strictly in this, as in other things, the Congregational system has conformed itself to the scriptures. There are systems of church order which are incompatible with this rule. A private member, under those schemes, may, if he choose, (but it is not, I believe, expected of him,) take the first and second steps; but what then? Shall he "tell it to the church?" But *the church* has no cognizance of the matter. The power to discipline is not in the church, but in the hands of the clergy alone; or, in some cases, of the clergy and subordinate officers. He may tell it to the rector; or to "the preacher in charge," if he will; but these are not the *church*; and this is not the rule. Besides, if the church should be destitute of a minister, as often happens, what then? The process stops, (supposing it to have been commenced;) a thing which can never occur under the Congregational system; because the church, though destitute of a minister, is still competent to discipline; though the presence and aid of a pastor is very desirable.

Is it said that the rector, or preacher, is the *representa-*

tive of the church; or that he acts *for* the church, and in its name and behalf? The answer does not satisfy us. He is not *the* church; nor is the discipline proceeding from his *authority* the same thing, either to the subject of it, or to the church, as when it expresses the voice of the brotherhood.

Where the scriptures have laid a duty directly upon a private member, or upon the church as a body, it does not satisfy the scriptures, that another person, or number of persons, should undertake that duty for them. Take, for example, those passages where the church as a body,—*the brethren*, in so many words, are charged with the business of discipline; as 1 Cor. v. 4—7, 13; 2 Thess. iii. 6. It is plain enough that the preacher, or rector of the church, cannot discharge the duty, and exonerate the church; inasmuch as he cannot be “gathered together” for the church; nor fulfil the injunctions, “Put away from among *yourselves* that wicked person;” “Brethren, *withdraw yourselves* from every brother that walketh disorderly.” They only upon whom the duty is imposed are competent to discharge it.

By what authority then has this express and salutary rule of Christ been laid aside? How comes it to have been formally laid out of the schemes in question; and to be still disused and made a dead letter to large portions of the church of Christ? Where is the “apostolic commission” to construct systems of church order in such a shape as to abrogate, or modify, this *more than apostolic* law of Christ himself?

OFFENCES OF A PUBLIC NATURE.

The following are specified in the New Testament, as requiring the discipline of the church.

1. Scandalous vices, or immoralities. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat."—"Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. v. 11, 13. 'These are a specimen of such offences. The list may be enlarged from such passages as 1 Cor. vi. 10; 2 Tim. iii. 2—5, and others. All open immoralities belong to the catalogue.

2. The denying of the essential truths of the gospel, or the embracing essential errors. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached, let him be accursed." "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not, &c. Gal. i. 8; 2 John 10, 11. Also, 1 Tim. vi. 3—5; 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18; Rev. ii. 14—16, 20; Gal. v. 12.

These passages, relating primarily to *teachers*, are constructively applicable to private members. If we may not harbor false teachers, we may not tolerate false doctrines among ourselves. In both cases, "they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker."

It may be difficult to say to what extent a person may “err from the truth,” and yet not be worthy of discipline or rejection. *All* truth is *important*; but not all is *fundamental*; and to some extent charity must be exercised. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” But with regard to those truths, the denial of which would be subversive of the Christian system, there can be no question. Such doubtless are the doctrines of Christ’s divinity and atonement; regeneration by the Spirit; justification by faith; the necessity of a holy life; and the future punishment of the impenitent. The denial of some of these is inconsistent with “holding the head;” while others of them make Christ the minister of sin, and are licentious.

3. Troubling the peace of the church by raising parties in it. “A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject:” the word *heretic*, in the original, meaning the *leader of a faction*, raised commonly on the ground of his peculiar doctrinal opinions; but applicable to any factious leader, whether the division be for doctrines, measures, or men. Tit. iii. 10; Rom. xvi. 17, 18; Gal. v. 12.

The case here does not respect the *morals* of the individual. He may be very correct in other respects, and even devout; but this must not exempt him from discipline. So far from it, the more he has of these fair qualities, the more able he will be, “by good words and fair speeches, to deceive the hearts of the simple.”

4. An idle, useless life ; with such unchristian practices as an idle life begets. “ For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busy-bodies.” “ Not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not.” 2 Thess. iii. 11—14. 1 Tim. v. 13. These things, always grievous, and always requiring the private reproofs of the brethren, become, in aggravated cases, subjects for formal discipline.

5. Neglecting to provide for one's dependent relatives, especially one's family, and leaving them either to want the comforts of life, or to live on charity,—whether through indolence or covetousness. This is a sin against nature, justice, and religion. “ If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” 1 Tim. v. 8.

6. Refusing to bear a reasonable part in the pecuniary support of the gospel. If we consider that this is *covetousness*, (itself a disciplinable sin ;) that it is *injustice* ; for it robs the laborer of his hire, or robs others to make it good ; that it is *disobedience to Christ*, who has “ ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel,” and made it the duty of “ him that is taught in the word to communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things ;” and that it betrays such indifference to the gospel, and such overvaluing of the

world, as is not far from *denying the faith*, in a manner "worse than an infidel;" we cannot doubt that it is worthy of discipline.

In addition to these specific cases, we have the general precept, "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." 2 Thess. iii. 6. What constitutes disorderly walking the enlightened moral sense of the church must determine.

It will be perceived that these offences are all of a different character, and require a different treatment, from that referred to in the eighteenth of Matthew. There, the offence is supposed to concern two individuals, between whom if the matter be settled, discipline is satisfied.* But the offences enumerated here are scandalous and public. They concern the peace and purity of the church, and the honor of religion; and are no more a trespass against one member than against them all; who are all therefore, alike concerned to re-

* I ought, perhaps, to have noticed under our Savior's rule, that some critics conjecture, (but not with confidence,) that the words *against thee*, (εἰς σε) should be omitted; being said to be wanting in some MSS. The passage is doubtless right, as it stands; but allowing the omission, it would not materially affect the rule. Instead of applying only to things of a personal nature between members, it would then include any sin which, being done in private, and known only to a few, might be privately healed. For sins publicly injurious, there is public discipline, which the rule of Christ does not supersede.

move them. There a brother is injured ; but here, Christ is wounded, and Zion mourns.

MANNER OF PROCEEDING.

In the prosecution of cases of discipline, much must be left to discretion. Some require a more summary, and others a more prolonged and lenient course ; some may be healed more privately, others more openly : according as the nature of the offence and the interest of religion dictate. Those steps are to be taken which, in the exercise of a sound judgment, appear best adapted to secure the objects of discipline, and most agreeable to the laws of Christ.

The first step, obviously, is for the church to satisfy itself of the *fact* of the offender's fault, with its qualifying circumstances ; if this be not already apparent. For this purpose it may be necessary to institute an inquiry, by means of a committee, or otherwise. It is then prepared to take such further steps as its wisdom may dictate.

Charges should be distinctly specified ; and should be communicated to the accused, in writing commonly, in sufficient time for him to consider them, preparatory to his appearance before the church. They should be sustained by evidence. Rumor and presumption, though they may justify an *inquiry* on the part of the church, and often demand it, are not a basis upon which to proceed to formal acts of discipline.

As the reclaiming of the offender is the first object, commonly, it will be proper, in most cases, to labor with him in private. As the preventing of like sins in others, and the public credit of religion, are other objects to be regarded, it is necessary, in grievous cases, to cite the accused before the church, according to the direction, 1 Tim. v. 20. If he there make confession, and the church be satisfied, to admonish and forgive him is all that is requisite. But if he appear not to be penitent, it is customary, (though some object to this, as having, in their view, no scripture warrant, but I think without good reason,) to *suspend* him from the communion, in the hope that time being given him for reflection, and further means being used, he may come to repentance. If all fails, his excommunication terminates the proceeding. "This (says President Edwards,) with the counsels and admonitions by which it is to be followed, is the last means that the church is to use, in order to reclaim those members which are become visibly wicked. If this be ineffectual, what is next to be expected is destruction without remedy."

In cases *extremely* iniquitous, or shameful, it appears to be the duty of the church, as its first act, to assemble and cast the offender out. This the Corinthians were directed to do in the case of the incestuous person, 1 Cor. v. There were no preparatory steps to be taken.

Some may question whether such summary dealing is suited to recover the offender, and on that account

may scruple its lawfulness ; since the recovery of the offender is to be regarded, as well as the honor of religion.

But here are several things to be considered. 1. The objection is a matter of *opinion*. The objector thinks the case is so. But in the view of others, the immediate excommunication of a heinous offender may be the means *best* suited to his recovery. It may be argued, that this solemn and sorrowful act of the church, expressing at once its abhorrence of the crime and its sense of the deep injury done to religion, while the shame of the culprit is now fresh in his own consciousness, and legible in the faces of others, and while the judgment of the world loudly confirms the judgment of the church ; is likely to be more impressive to him, and to show him more effectually to what a depth he is fallen, than a more gradual procedure. Such was the effect upon the incestuous Corinthian. So long as he retained his place in the church, he repented not ; but being cast out, he was filled with sorrow ; and was received again into the church.* Besides, the act of excommunication does not hinder the church from still using all hopeful means with the guilty member ; who,

* 2 Cor. ii. 6—8. This passage may serve also, as a comment on the former, (1 Cor. v.) as to the *manner* in which the discipline was executed. It was the act of the church as a body : and not of its officers alone : “ Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was *inflicted of many* ;” literally, by the *majority*.

though separated from their communion, is not to be counted as an enemy, but admonished as a brother. There is no certainty that he will not be reclaimed, being cast out ; and there is none that he will be, if retained. 2. Though the reclaiming of the offender be a very *important* end of discipline, and ought to call into exercise all the wisdom, tenderness and faithfulness, of the church, yet I am not certain that either reason or the Bible tells us that this is always the *most* important end. If we might suppose that the retaining him for a time, with all his infamy upon him, would be such a discredit to religion, or so dangerous to the members, as in all likelihood to occasion the ruin of *many* souls, it would seem to be duty to cast him out even to the probable ruin of his,—supposing this latter consequence to follow ; which, however, is not conceded. The question is, is his remaining in the church of greater importance than the church itself ; and must we sacrifice, or even jeopardize the church, in the uncertain hope of reclaiming him ? The church lives or dies with its character : shall his iniquity, then, be made its grave ? Grant that he *may be* a Christian, or that he certainly *is* one, notwithstanding his crime ; he may not be a fit person to be in the church at present. 3. If we have scripture for the measure, that must suffice ; and this I think we have, in the case of the church at Corinth.

It is the opinion of some that our Savior's rule in Matthew is to be followed *in all cases*, public as well as private ; and this is the practice of some churches.

But in the view of others this is a misapplication of the rule. For, 1. it does not appear to consist with the obvious sense of the passage. The offence there contemplated is a personal one : “ If thy brother trespass *against thee*.” If it be said that every offence may be assumed and treated as a personal one, inasmuch as it is a breach of a mutual and common covenant, then it is personal to *all* the members, and all ought to take the steps required : which is no where practiced, and would be absurd. 2. The rule, literally followed, does not appear to be adapted to satisfy the ends of discipline, in public cases. Take, for example, such as are mentioned by Paul, “ If any man that is called a brother be a *fornicator*, a *railer*, a *drunkard*, &c.” A member goes to such an one, and tells him his fault in private, following the rule of Christ. And suppose he confesses and repents. Are the objects of discipline gained ? Is the wounded honor of religion healed, in this private way ? Is there a salutary impression made upon the church ? Is the offender himself deterred, by such easy terms, from a repetition of his sin ? Or if each member goes in turn, and is privately satisfied, are those objects *then* gained ? No, not at all. An open, scandalous iniquity, blown far and wide by fame, calls for something more than private auricular confession. “ Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.”

I am aware that it is said that the visiting brother may require a public confession, as the satisfaction he

seeks ; and that so the public ends of discipline will be secured. But this is not the rule. It does not say you shall go to your brother in private and require a public confession ; but it says, if he hear you in private, let it be settled in private. Thou hast gained thy brother : it need not be told to the church. This is the rule as it stands. The construction proposed is, that it shall be told to the church if he do hear, and the same if he do not.

The truth is, as it appears to me, our Savior refers to a strictly personal and private affair, such as is often occurring between man and man, and of which the world takes no notice. At the same time, this excellent rule is a standing law of wisdom, from which, doubtless, we are to draw lessons for almost every occasion of discipline. It teaches us to regard the natural infirmity of human nature, by using, when we may, private endeavors, rather than the more mortifying and pride-alarming ones of a public nature ; and to save religion itself from all needless exposure of the errors of its disciples. It teaches us to be ever kind, gentle, and forbearing ; and to use means for the recovery of such as are fallen, as mild, as various, as protracted, and as hopeful, as the nature of the case will admit.

The following is the doctrine of the Cambridge Platform on the subject.

“ But if the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature, then the church, without such gradual proceeding, is to cast out the of-

fender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sin, and the healing of his soul in the day of the Lord Jesus.”* With this agrees the Saybrook Platform. “Admonition is in case of private offences to be performed according to the rule in Matt. xviii. 15—17, and in case of public offences, openly before the church, as the honor of the gospel, and the nature of the scandal, shall require.”† The doctrine of the Westminster Assembly’s, or Presbyterian Directory for church censures is the same.

FORSAKING THE COMMUNION.

There is an offence not mentioned in the foregoing list, which must be noticed. It is when a member improperly forsakes the communion of the church at the Lord’s table.

Why is the church to notice this? 1. Because the member, having covenanted to walk with the church in Christian fellowship, and in a due observance of ordinances, his forsaking its communion is a violation of that covenant. 2. There is something criminal in the *motive*, or state of mind, which induces the delinquency. Commonly it is some disagreement with a fellow member; or some offence taken at the church, for some of its proceedings; or at the pastor. Or the table of the Lord is forsaken because, in the judgment of the absconding member, some are found there who

* Chap xiv.

† Heads of Agreement, Sect. iii.

are unworthy ; or it is forsaken through sloth and indifference ; or in the conscious shame of general declension and inconsistency.

None of these motives are very Christian ones : and I fear there is sometimes a worse than any of these. I fear there *are* instances, I hope not numerous, when the absenting member is actuated by a motive of *malevolence*. He forsakes the communion as an expression of his anger, or hostility. He does it supposing that it will disquiet the member with whom he is at variance, and that it will cast blame upon him. Or, if the church, or the pastor is concerned, he thinks it will implicate and afflict them or him. He takes a course which shows an assumption of judgment in his own favor, and an impeachment of the other party.

The conduct is wrong, and the example bad, whatever be the motive. If you have a difficulty with a member, it is your duty, not to forsake the ordinances and fellowship of the church, but to take immediate measures, according to the rule of Christ, for the healing of the difficulty. If your dissatisfaction is with the doings or judgment of the church in some matter, upon however clear or reasonable grounds your dissatisfaction rests, your course is wrong notwithstanding ; for it is subversive of all order, by setting up the will of an individual above the whole, or perhaps, of a minority above the majority. You have a right to make your dissatisfaction known, if you choose, but this is not the way to do it. As to the presence of unworthy

communicants, if that is your difficulty, it is your duty, not to forsake the communion on their account, but either to endeavor to have them properly disciplined, as you promised to do in your covenant, or else to bear with them, remembering that there are "tares" in all, even the best of churches; and that wholly to eradicate them, even when they are visible, is often a matter too difficult to be effected. But if all will not do, there is no remedy for you but to take an honorable dismissal and remove—which you ought not lightly to do—to some other church.

It does not avail to say you commune elsewhere. You covenanted to commune with *this* church. Nor does your communing elsewhere help your *example*. It rather proclaims what ought to be hid, nay, what ought not to be. To those who know the reason of your absence, it looks as though you were living in a quarrel with a brother, or with the church, or your minister; or had excommunicated them all for unsoundness, or disorder, having disowned and withdrawn yourself from them, and gone to another and better fraternity. To those who are ignorant of the reason, you appear as a simple neglecter of ordinances. They see your seat vacant in the house of God, and at the Lord's table, and knowing no other cause, naturally enough conclude that you are abiding indolently at home. In a word, the practice is too sinful in itself, and too evil in its tendencies, to be allowed. It ought to be, as it is, a subject of discipline.

MISCELLANEOUS AND GENERAL REMARKS ON THE SUBJECT OF DISCIPLINE.

1. It is to be remembered that all cases of discipline, once taken up, are to be brought to one of two results ; the reformation of the offender, or else his excommunication. They must never be dropped short of one or the other of these issues.

Hence it follows, that no matter can be a proper subject for discipline at all, (though it may be, for private reproof) for which the offender could not be scripturally excommunicated in case of his persisting in it.

2. Excommunication, though it is essentially the same in its results in all cases, as cutting the delinquent off from the name and privileges of membership, and is never a trivial affair ; yet, in respect to the form of it, it is susceptible of different degrees of severity. In the case of one who forsakes the communion of the church, but is not otherwise scandalous, the church may simply disown, or cease to know him as a member. "He having thereby cut himself off from that church's communion, the church may justly esteem and declare itself discharged of any further inspection over him."* It may withdraw its watch and care. But in the case of notorious and obstinate offenders, the act of excommunication should be more formal and impressive. It should be something more than to pass

* Saybrook Platform.

and silently record a vote. "If the case be notoriously bad, pronounce sentence at the table of the Lord, with great solemnity."* Some declare it from the pulpit, in the most public manner.

With this the scriptures appear to agree. From some they direct us to '*withdraw*,' ourselves; in the case of others, the direction is, in language less mild, to '*cut off*,' '*reject*,' and '*put away from among ourselves*,' the wicked person. In the case of the *very heinous* offender at Corinth, the church was required to assemble, and in the most solemn manner, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, '*to deliver such an one unto Satan*, [that is, as I understand it, to give him back again into that world which is Satan's kingdom, he being "the god of this world,"] for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.'

3. It sometimes happens that an offending member is so uninformed as to imagine that he can *withdraw* from the church at will, and thus escape from its censure. The gospel knows no such rule. It supposes no separation from the church, except by regular dismissal to another church, or by excommunication.

4. The censures of the church are to be administered by the pastor, in accordance with the vote of the brethren.

*Doddridge.

The pastor, though not competent to pronounce sentence in his own name, without the concurrence of the church, is not, however, to be considered as the mere chairman, or moderator, of the church, in the business of discipline. Far from this. It belongs to him, not only to see that the matter is properly laid before the meeting, and properly treated, but to set forth the law of Christ in regard to it ; and to declare his own judgment, if he think proper, before he call for the vote of the brethren : and the latter are in duty bound to accord with him, unless they are, with good reason, satisfied that he is in an error. It is the doctrine of the old Congregationalists that, the brethren have no more liberty to dissent from the judgment of their pastor in a matter of discipline, than they have to oppose his doctrine delivered from the pulpit ; for the laws relating to discipline are themselves doctrines, or precepts, which he is bound to preach, and enforce, no less than other truths ; and the people are bound to receive them in the same manner ; that is, they are bound to receive them in either case, unless they can show that they are not agreeable to the word of God. He is as much set for the defence of the gospel in respect to the proper execution of its discipline, as in any other respect ; and the bible expects him to act, and to be regarded in this, no less than in other things, as a guide and leader to the church. Hence, if the brethren cannot offer serious reasons for dissenting from him, “ they are bound (says Hooker) to join their judgment with his in the

completing of the sentence, without impertinent questions, needless scruples, or wilful and disorderly gain-sayings."

5. No member under censure of the church, or excommunicated by it, can lawfully be received to the communion and fellowship of another church; and any church which should violate this plain law of propriety and duty, whether of the same or of another denomination, would be guilty of taking sides with the offender against the laws of Christ. If Christ himself has declared* that *he* will confirm in heaven what a church does in the faithful execution of his laws upon an offender, it is an act not far from rebellion, it is presumption not far from impious, in another church, to nullify what that church does, and to loose on earth what Christ binds in heaven, by taking the excluded member to its bosom.

6. The discipline of the church should be attended to *promptly*. It is better on every account, to take an offence in the time of it, than after long delay. Neglected sores are the most difficult to heal. Is the good of the offender regarded? The reproof, lagging far behind the offence, is likely to fail of effect. Is the honor of the church concerned? Who delays, when his reputation is suffering, for months or years before

*Matt. xviii. 18.

he attempts to relieve it? And is not the character of the church as valuable and as soon to be vindicated as that of a man?

It must be *faithful*. Every reason which demands the discipline at all demands that it be thorough. "Great care is to be taken that we be not overstrict or rigorous, yet, the winning and healing of the offender's soul being the end of these endeavors, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly."* I have before remarked that it should be carried through, when once taken up. To commence a process of dealing with an offender, and then to drop or recede from it without an issue, leaving his sin upon him unrepented of, and the church unsatisfied, and the honor of religion unrelieved, is not only a sin against him, being an omission of those means which Christ has appointed for his recovery, but is disobedience to Christ, proclaims the weakness or unfaithfulness of the church, and is a bad precedent which is likely both to multiply occasions for discipline, and to embarrass the treatment of them.

It must be *uniform*. Every offence, and not merely some offences, should receive its due attention. That is a badly administered government which is unequal, pursuing some offenders and neglecting others; or which is fitful and capricious, now negligent and now strenuous.

It must be *impartial*. No pecuniary or family influ-

* Camb. Platform.

ence, no worldly consideration whatever, may cover the man of consequence, while a humbler member would experience no such forbearance. Or, in another view of the subject, let not the soul of the rich or honorable man be less regarded than the soul of the poor or obscure ; but let the same means be used for his recovery as for the other's.

It must be *independent*. It is no uncommon thing for the world without, and especially for relations and friends, to set in and espouse the cause of the censured. But the church of Christ must know no rule of action but his will. That done, it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment.

6. All the members should take part in the discharge of this important duty. They should all sustain the discipline of the church by their presence and vote ; not only because this is the equal and common duty of all, but because the efficacy of discipline depends, in a great degree, upon the concurrence of the whole society in it, instead of its resulting from the action of only a few.

And here is a too frequent cause of complaint. It is the habit of too many members to withdraw themselves from this business : sometimes through negligence, but oftener, probably, from reluctance.

If the duty be unpleasant, if it be a painful and responsible one, for that very reason it is wrong for you to desert it, and leave it to be done by your brethren ; to whom it becomes more embarrassing in consequence of such desertion.

It is sometimes said, as an apology, "The member is my relative, or my neighbor, and I do not like to offend him." How then do you construe the business of discipline? Offend him? Do you view it in the light of an *aggression* upon your neighbor? Do you mean that the discipline appointed by Christ is an unkindly and unneighborly thing; an aggressive and persecuting movement, in which you cannot participate? Is it an offence against your brother to convert him from the error of his way, and save his soul from death? Consider for what it is that discipline is instituted; and if your brother have fallen into "the condemnation of the devil," or into any of those "foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition, and the means, the best means for his recovery are before you, consider what is the part of kindness towards him;—whether neglect of the means, or the faithful application of them. Do not desert the discipline nor abandon him; but do what you can to sustain the one and save the other.

If it be wrong to desert the discipline of the church, it is still worse to be present only to embarrass it by needless scruples, or captious objections. If you think it your duty to dissent from the majority of your brethren, you have a right, certainly, to do so. But let your reasons and motives be well considered. If from a vain affectation of showing your superior wisdom, or liberality, you should appear as the abettor of the offender's iniquity, and confirm him in it, against the endeavors of your brethren, you must be answerable to God for the consequences.

7. It is of the greatest importance always to keep in view the *ends* of discipline, and especially *that* end which, in all ordinary cases, is the first to be aimed at; namely, the recovery of the delinquent. That gained, all is gained. It is at once the most pleasing result in itself, and the most honorable to the church and the gospel. It is true that by the excommunication of the offender, the church has cleared itself of the scandal; but then a member is lost to it, and perhaps to himself. But if he be brought to true repentance, and to newness of life; if, like Peter, he weep bitterly; not only is the church relieved from the scandal, but it is the honored instrument of his recovery. While an unfeeling world would only have reproached, discarded, and hardened him, he becomes by means of the church, a man forgiven of God, and worthy of the renewed confidence and esteem of men. What more honored instrumentality, what more gratifying result, than this? "Perhaps there is scarcely a more edifying sight than a lapsed christian, ingenuously confessing his sin, acknowledging the justice of his punishment, imploring the forgiveness of God and a reunion to the family of Christ, and recommencing the christian life with new amiableness and beauty. Nothing in this world more resembles the joy of angels over a repenting sinner, than the emotions excited in the minds of good men by this solemn transaction."*

8. Too great heed cannot be taken as to what *spirit*

* Dr. Dwight.

we are of, in this matter. If the object be to gain our brother, this is not to be effected by a process of barren *forms*, much less by unkindness and reproach. We must feel and manifest a real concern for his good. We must make him see, if possible, that though an *erring* brother, he is still to us as a *brother*; and that we do not forget that it is a brother's feelings, a brother's character, and a brother's immortal welfare, that we are handling; and, if he compel us to go so far as to divide him from our company, that it is with unfeigned sorrow we proceed to that extremity, in the discharge of a duty, to him, as well as to Christ, which we dare not disregard.

9. The faithful discharge of this duty is the truest test of a Christian church. The apostle writing to the Corinthians concerning the disorderly member whom he had required them to excommunicate, tells them he did it to prove the universality and the *reality* of their obedience to Christ: "For to this end also did I write, that I might know *the proof of you*, whether ye be obedient in *all* things." Whatever a church may be in respect to its creeds or its forms; whatever diligence it may use in gathering numbers to a visible profession within its pale; however costly the temple it erects and dedicates to God, or thronged the attendance there; if it be wanting in the article of discipline, it lacks an essential proof of its being a genuine church of Christ. Ye are my friends, saith Christ, if ye do whatsoever I

command you ; and on what subject are his commands more explicit than on this ? It was their remissness in this particular, that called forth his rebukes of several of the seven churches of Asia ; and the faithful performance of it by others of them, that received his commendation.

Finally ; I know of no language too strong to express the importance of this subject, or to impress it suitably on the mind. The discipline of the church, essential to its purity, is essential to every object for which it exists. Its increasing, and, eventually, entire corruption, will be the consequence of its neglecting this duty. Sin not purged out, is by an apostle compared to leaven, which leavens the mass. No such church can truly prosper ; or can answer the ends for which churches are instituted. Forfeiting the favor of Christ, through neglect of his laws ; losing the respect of the world, and its self-respect, through the tolerated scandals that spring up in it and blemish its character : it will go down hill decaying and losing its vitality, till little shall remain to it but its name and form, to distinguish it from the world. It is no longer a city set on a hill. Its comeliness, and beauty, and influence, are gone. It may still bear the ‘banners,’ but no longer has the ‘terribleness,’ of an army of Christ. Or, if it should appear outwardly to flourish, as some churches do, in whose assemblies the gay and the worldly find it convenient to worship, some for fashion and some for form’s sake, and where church

ambition builds more diligently than godly sincerity and faithfulness to souls,—if it should go on growing in numbers, and accumulating materials of some sort, its prosperity is deceptive. “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Whatever it may have of the form, it will have little of the reality, of a spiritual society. It will want the simplicity, it will want the fervor, the distinctness from the world, the religious energy and influence, and all that is proper to ‘a peculiar people, purified by Christ. It is a field where tares grow by permission. They may increase its greenness and luxuriance for the time, and flatter the undiscerning eye of the cultivator, or beholder; but what will the harvest be “in the end of the world?”

If such be the importance of discipline, let it be faithfully attended to; and let not fear or policy prevent. The case may arise, it often does, when to go forward in a thorough discharge of this duty may seem to be portentous of evil. It may threaten to harass the church with the resentments of disorderly but powerful members; to overwhelm it with clamors; to diminish its strength; or to destroy its existence. But faith is to be exercised here as in every thing else pertaining to the kingdom of Christ. The remembrance that it is Christ’s laws that we are called to administer, and Christ’s church that is concerned in the consequences; that it is his

wisdom that appoints, his authority that commands, his power that sustains; and that, whatever the issue may be, it can never be worse than his displeasure; should be our sufficient warrant to proceed. There can be no ground to fear that he will not vindicate his own laws, and bear out his church in a faithful administration of them. Nor let it be imagined that these laws can be dispensed with, without incurring his frown, and revealing, sooner or later, the folly of forsaking the wisdom of Christ, for the timid dictates of human prudence.

Very many facts might be given corroborative of these remarks: showing in some cases the decay and corruption of churches through neglect of discipline; and in others, their great prosperity in consequence of its maintenance. I am acquainted with a church, once large and flourishing, "one of the green spots of Connecticut," as I have heard it called, where, in consequence of there being no discipline, I was told, there had been no conversions, or very few, for some twenty years or more! by which time both the church and the place were as full of disorders as can well be imagined. On the other hand, I could mention churches which have been blessed with successive revivals and large accessions in connection with this duty. And this is what ought to be expected. For when is a church more prepared to be blessed in this manner, than it is in that peculiar frame which is suited to the work of discipline?—humble,

prayerful, forgiving, and sensible of dependence on God. Or when is its separateness from the world more impressively evident to "them that are without," than when it divides the wicked from its company?

A venerable minister related the following. He was the pastor of a small country parish in Connecticut. Six of the male members, persons of influence, became guilty of heinous offences at one time. He began, with a heavy heart, to take such steps as the case required; when some of the brethren besought him to desist, at least for a time, thinking, in consideration of the standing of these persons in society, and that of their families, that to subject them to discipline would prove the destruction of the church. To this timid policy he yielded; and "from that time," his language was, "the church visibly went down, down, down, till it scarcely existed, and seemed threatened with a total extinction. I perceived my error and awoke to my duty; and going to such of the members as I could most confide in, whom I found by this time to be of my mind, I said to them, 'We *must* go forward and execute the laws of Christ's house.' We did so; and in one day cut off the six.

"I had appointed a meeting that evening at a private house, by desire of a poor sick woman whom illness had long detained from our public assemblies. I went expecting to meet a few neighbors only, when, to my great surprise, the house was filled. The Spirit of God was there,—and for those *six*, the Lord gave us *sixty*!

that number being added to the church as the fruit of the revival which then commenced."

TREATMENT OF EXCOMMUNICATED PERSONS.

We have a twofold duty to perform towards excommunicated persons. One respects the deportment we are to observe towards them in regard to society and intercourse; the other respects the endeavors we are to use with a view to their repentance and return to the Christian family. We are to *have no company with* the excommunicate, that he may be ashamed; yet we are not to count him as an *enemy* but *admonish* him as a brother. 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15.

At 1 Cor. v. 11, the direction is not to keep company with such as are there described, "*no not to eat*;" which some have interpreted the not making them our *guests*, or being theirs; but which is more commonly supposed to mean, that we must not voluntarily sit down with them even to an ordinary meal. I say, *with such as are there described*, viz. "fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards," and other grossly licentious and vicious persons. Some have understood the injunction, "*no not to eat*," to apply to *all* excommunicated persons; but I think with doubtful propriety; for this is reducing all offences, the most heinous and the least so, to a common level, and subjecting them all to a common measure of abhorrence. Besides, the words are applied by the apostle to a specific class of offences; "with *such* an one, no not to eat."

From a view of the several passages which speak of this subject, it appears to me this general inference is to be drawn ; namely, that *we are to treat each excommunicated person according to the character of his offence*. From a member who *walks disorderly*, we are to *withdraw* ourselves. He is disowned of the Christian family, and while he remains so, we are to have no further communion or fellowship with him. He is not to be recognised as a professor of religion, or as a Christian. This is a general rule. Others are more specific. Them that *cause divisions* we are to mark and *avoid*. We are to treat them as *dangerous* persons ; from whom we are to keep at a distance, as the most suitable way of expressing our disapprobation of them, and, at the same time, the most effectual way of preventing their mischiefs : for factious leaders are soon out of countenance when they can get none to adhere or listen to them. The same remark may apply to errorists in doctrine. “ Let them alone.” A member persisting in an injury done to another to that degree that he *contemns or resists the united endeavors of the church*, till they are forced to expel him, is to discover, in their subsequent deportment towards him, that his moral level, in their view, is no higher than that of “ a heathen man and a publican ;” while the *indecent, licentious, and abominable*, are to be avoided to the utmost degree, as to our having any society with them, even so much as to eat. They are to be viewed and treated as men whose deeds are shameful, and themselves abhorrent to the Christian name.

In every case there is a greater reserve required to be observed towards excommunicated persons, than towards the same grade of sinners who are not of the church. See 1 Cor. v. 9—11, where a distinction is made between sinners of the world and excommunicated professors.

As a general remark it may be observed, that whatever our deportment is to be in particular cases, it should in all cases be such, towards persons under censure of the church, whether before excommunication, or after, as to *sustain and consist with the object* of the censure, and not to defeat it. It were a vain thing to impose a censure by our *vote*, and then nullify it by our *actions*. It is our behavior towards the subject, and not the formality of a vote merely, that must give efficacy to the discipline.

But while we may manifest no complacency in the excommunicate as a Christian, we are not to forget his soul, or to cast him off utterly from our Christian regards, but are to use all suitable means to bring him back to repentance and to Christ. It was for this very end, among others, we should remember, that he was cut off from the church,—that by his loss of its privileges and its Christian esteem, he might be made more sensible of his fallen condition. Perhaps we should show even more concern for him (though hope be less,) than if he had never sustained to us the endeared but forfeited relation of a brother in Christ.

Exceptions are of course to be made in favor of the

common duties and offices of humanity; such as relieving the sick and distressed; and in favor of the domestic and other particular relations. "Excommunication doth not release children from the obligation of duty to their parents, nor parents from parental affection and care towards their children. Nor are husbands and wives released from the duties proper to their relation. And so of all other less relations, whether natural, domestic, or civil."*

Whenever the excommunicate becomes a penitent, and satisfies the church of the same by a due confession of his sin, he is then to be restored. 2 Cor. ii. 8.

* Pres. Edwards.

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH MEETINGS AND CHURCH BUSINESS.

EVERY church has its meetings for business. It were much to be wished that such meetings were more frequent than they are, in most of our churches. The desirableness of them must be obvious to every one who reflects on the variety and importance of the interests over which every church is called to exercise its wisdom and care. Besides attention to discipline, how many occasions are there for consultation on the state of religion and the means of reviving it; for devising ways and means for the support of the gospel at home, and its extension abroad; for attending to the various concerns of the Sabbath school; the choir; the relief of the poor, and other important matters?

There is a culpable neglect on the part of some in regard to attending these meetings. Some are always at their post; but the occasion must be a very extraordinary one indeed which can assemble the whole body. "More time, (says Dr. Beecher,) should be devoted by the members of local churches to consultation and social prayer. No *secular* interest so diversified, extended, important, and difficult, depending on the resources and steady co-operation of so many individuals, of different age and capacity, could be successfully protected, and extended, without reiterated consultation. And

yet how difficult, how almost impossible it is, to convene punctually the members of almost any church, to attend to the public concerns of Christ's kingdom, and to implore the blessing of God upon their labors."

My first topic, then, shall be the *duty of attending*, punctually and faithfully, the business meetings of the church. I urge the duty upon *every member*, upon the ground that whatever is done, or to be done, at these meetings, is the equal concern of all; being made so by their mutual equality as brethren, by their mutual and common covenant, and by their common relation and obligation to Christ and his cause. With the reflecting and upright member this is sufficient. It does not appear to be so with all.

I would inquire of the delinquent member, what it is that prevails with him to be absent from these meetings. Do you say there will be a sufficient number to attend to the business without you? This is the very language of selfishness and indifference, which I am sorry to hear from a Christian. The business can be *done* perhaps, but it cannot be done as *well*, as if you and all were there who should be. For where responsibility is to be borne, or judgment to be exercised, "two are better than one," and "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." It cannot be done as well, and if it could be, there is no propriety in your leaving it to be done by others, whose obligation is no greater than yours. Were all to do as you do, who might with equal propriety, the meeting fails entirely, the business is deserted, and the cause suffers.

But you are weary, perhaps; or your business is pressing; or you live at a distance; or the sky is dark.

In extreme cases these are sufficient excuses; but they are by far too often made. Remember that others are subject to all these calls and inconveniences no less than you. And if you plead weariness and distance, think of the wearisome journeys and toilsome hours which Christ endured for the church's sake; whom neither a burning sun, nor "cold mountains and the midnight air," detained from his proper work.*

Some may excuse themselves from a feeling that they are too *obscure* or *uninformed* to render any service by their attendance; and the *young* may imagine that the affairs in question belong to the more experienced wisdom of the pastor and older brethren.

To the former I would say, your modesty is amiable, but your practice is wrong. Your presence, however humble, will be gratifying to those who attend, and will be worth much as an example. A pious example is often the more conspicuous from the very lowliness of the condition of him that exhibits it. The deeper the valley, and the denser the shade, the more apparent the light which is carried. Who does not read the story of the Dairyman's Daughter, or of Poor Joseph, or of that humble family of Bethany which Jesus loved, with a sympathy deeper and more admiring than he would be affected with in contemplating equal piety

*John 4, 6. Luke 6, 12.

in higher conditions? Let your example be one of consistency and constancy, and it will not be lost, however humble your condition, or limited your knowledge. But more than this, your silent presence and vote will give at least some additional weight and efficacy to the measures of the meeting, and peradventure your wisdom may enlighten them. In the words of another, "you ought to be there, for, though you be weak, and ignorant, and humble, it is possible that you alone may carry thither the information which will be needed to solve some difficulty; it is possible that to your mind may be suggested the thought that shall prevent or settle some rising dissension."*

To the *young members* I would say, if the wisdom and experience of the older be superior to yours, for that very reason your ought to be there. There is the place for you to be gathering lessons from their experience, which will qualify you to fill their places when they are gone, and to become, in turn, pillars in the church, as they have been.

A few words now on the *order* to be observed in these meetings. They should always be opened, if not concluded with prayer. In the absence of the pastor, one of the deacons presides. Every member has an equal right to express his views; and it is desirable that as much freedom should be used as is consistent with a becoming modesty and despatch of business. Yet it is a good rule, "Let every man be swift to hear,

*Bacon's Church Manual.

slow to speak ;” and, “ Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder : yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” *Talkative* persons are an affliction in any assembly.

The meeting should be commenced punctually and carried forward with promptness. Late beginning and slow moving looks like indifference ; or as if we had come together not knowing wherefore ; or were at a loss to proceed. Let us act like men that understand themselves. If the business of religion require seriousness and calmness in those who deliberate, it is not honored by feebleness and prolixity. Let us remember the value of time ; and that where so many are met, it may have been with special inconvenience to some. While one is consuming the time with tediousness or digression, the thoughts of another may be urged homewards by some pressing call of domestic or other duty ; or while one is but a step from his home, and is quite at his ease, another has a long road to travel.

The meeting should be conducted throughout with seriousness and dignity, as in Christ’s presence and about his business. For where two or three are gathered together in his name, whether for business or devotion, there is he in the midst of them. All such things as discursive or desultory talking, whispering, talking apart in groups, altercation between members, or addressing each other instead of the chair, speaking without rising, and indifferent and listless postures should be avoided.

Especially should we observe such serious deportment when we are met to attend to discipline. It is the seriousness and dignity of the meeting, joined with meekness and benignity, as acting in Christ's presence and by his authority, that makes its censures impressive to the subject of them, and commands the respect of all.

ARTICLES OF PRACTICE—TEMPERANCE.

It is common for a church to draw up a few general rules as a directory of its practice. The time is not distant, I trust, when, in every church which shall be worthy of the name, these articles shall embrace the doctrine of total abstinence from ardent spirits. And in anticipation of that event I introduce the subject here.

It is objected by some, that to require our members to subscribe to the temperance principle as a condition of membership, would be the imposition of a new term of communion not authorized by Christ.

But this is to be determined by a previous question ; Whether the selling and using of ardent spirit, as a drink, be a moral, or an immoral practice ? If it be immoral, then the excluding it from the church is no human imposition, or new condition of membership ; for Christ himself allows of no immoral practice in his church.

Now it has become the declared opinion of a multi-

tude of sober and intelligent people that the practice is immoral. Not only have many large and most respectable temperance conventions harmoniously passed resolves, that the making, vending, and using ardent spirit as a drink, are morally wrong, but numerous ecclesiastical bodies have done the same; and thousands of individuals, on both sides of the water, have expressed the same conviction. And I am sure that no one can dissent from it, who looks at the evils which ardent spirit produces, and is not ignorant of the precepts and spirit of his bible. The whole bible is against the article in question. A book which inculcates nothing but purity and benevolence cannot approve of that which produces nothing but evil—which fills the world with drunkenness, misery, and crime. Let him that *deals* in intoxicating drinks reconcile his practice with that ‘love which worketh no ill to his neighbor, and is therefore the fulfilling of the law;’ and let him that *uses* it do the same: for if it be right to use the article, it must be right to make and sell.

I conclude, therefore, that the exclusion of ardent spirit, as a drink, from our churches must be agreeable to the mind of Christ. But as to the *mode* of doing this, it would not be proper to require the candidate for admission first to go and join a temperance society; for this would be making the church of Christ to depend on another and distinct institution. The temperance principle should be included in the practice of the

church itself; so that any one becoming a member of the church should be *ipso facto* a temperance man. In constituting a temperance church, perhaps some such form as the following would be suitable.

‘Believing that ardent spirit [or *intoxicating liquors*, if we ought to include all that intoxicates,] is not only unnecessary, but hurtful, as a drink: and in view of the numerous and great evils which result from the use of it, to the bodies and souls of men; and more especially, in view of the mischiefs which have hence arisen to the church of Christ, it being a most fruitful source of scandal and discipline; therefore this church declare and agree as follows:

1. That it is the solemn conviction of this church that the practice of using and trafficking in ardent spirit as a drink is morally wrong, and that it is the duty of all such as profess to be Christ’s disciples to abstain from and discourage such use and traffic.

2. That we will not use ardent spirit ourselves, nor furnish it for others, except conscientiously as a medicine, in case of bodily ailment; nor will we traffic in it, as an article of drink.

3. That it shall hereafter be a standing rule of this church, that no person shall be received into it, either on profession or by letter, who shall refuse assent to these articles.’

With regard to those who are already members of the church, and refuse to act on the temperance prin-

ciple, all that we can do is, to endeavor by all suitable means to win them over to so good a cause, and to so plain a duty, and then to leave them to their own convictions, and great account.

STANDING COMMITTEES.

Many of our churches have standing committees. Such committees, charged with a general oversight of the ordinary interests of the church, may be very serviceable. But in assigning them their duties, care should be taken not to violate the essential principles of the Congregational system. I have before me instances of such committees invested with powers almost identical with those of a Presbyterian session. To commit the watch and discipline of the church to a permanent committee, in such a manner as to discharge the church as a body from those duties, is not Congregationalism.

CHAPTER VI.

RELATIONS OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE Congregational churches, like the primitive, and most of the modern churches, have their *settled* Pastors. A ministry wholly itinerant, or often changing, though it may render much excellent service, is not adequate to all the wants of churches and societies, nor competent to all the good which the Christian ministry is designed to effect. The officers of a church are essential to its organization. It is incomplete without them, and especially without its pastor.

The pastoral office is, by divine appointment, a permanent office in every church; its duties are permanent; the necessities of the church and community are such as at all times to demand its exercise. Hence the New Testament churches had their permanent pastors. "They ordained them elders in every city." And hence the explicit and careful instructions which are given respecting the qualifications and duties which pertain to this office, and the duty of the people in regard to it.

A church, or society, that has no settled minister, has no pastor. It may have a series of occasional supplies, or a succession of evangelists, missionaries, or traveling preachers, but the man that fills its pulpit is not its *pastor*. He has not the relations, and consequently has not the sympathies, nor the responsibilities and cares, which are peculiar to that office.

'The benefits of a settled ministry are very great. The relation is an endearing one both to minister and people. He dwells among them as a shepherd among his flock, whose voice they know. He is not a stranger held loosely to them by a temporary connection ; but has his home and his children's home among them.

He is acquainted with every family. He knows their history, their character, their circumstances, their joys, griefs, sicknesses. He is with them at their marriages, and at their funerals ; and on many occasions of anxiety, of delicacy, of embarrassment and distress, such as the stranger intermeddleth not with, is their tried friend, counsellor, and comforter.

He is the baptizer of their children ; and with a concern inferior only to that of the parents, and often surpassing that, he watches over their advancing childhood and youth.

He is the judicious friend of education, and of all which pertains to the good of the community ; in which he has the threefold interest of a pastor, a citizen, and a father. He is identified with his people in all that concerns their welfare.

His home is the well known place of resort and entertainment for clergymen and other religious strangers who visit the place.

Being a permanent resident, he is more concerned for the results of his ministry than he naturally would be, were his stay but temporary. He cannot, like those who stay is short, light fires, in his boldness or impru-

dence, and then go off by the light of them, and leave them to burn, or be quenched by others.

The settled pastor feels a *growing* interest in his flock. The longer he is with them, the more he labors and cares for them, the oftener he is called to sympathize with them, weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with those that rejoice, and the more he experiences of their kindness towards himself, the deeper does his affectionate concern for them naturally become. I know of no affection more sacred and unquenchable than that of a long settled pastor for his people.

The settled pastor is acquainted with the spiritual condition of his people, as a stranger cannot be, and knows what is needful for them, from time to time, in the way of instruction, reproof, or consolation. Directed by this knowledge, and compelled too by the permanency of his ministry and his unchanging auditory, he of necessity takes a wider compass in his preaching, and his hearers receive, in the end, a greater variety and amount of instruction than would, or perhaps could be given, by a succession of transient preachers. The itinerant preacher, with an audience always new, needs but a few discourses, in memory or manuscript, to answer his calls. He is not obliged to be very diversified in his ministrations, nor is it probable that he will be. He naturally selects a few topics, and those commonly which are the most exciting, and the most obvious and familiar; and with these begins and fini-

ishes his temporary work. Another follows, and then another, much in the same strain. The consequence is that the people, though abundantly and fervidly exhorted upon a few topics, acquire but a defective knowledge of truth.

It is not so with the settled pastor. It depends on him, and he feels it to be his duty, as one set apart for the instruction of a particular people, to acquaint them with the whole counsel of God. They look to *him* chiefly for the bread of life, and to him the injunction comes emphatically and solemnly, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God." The church cannot be *fed* as the pastor is required to feed them, they cannot be instructed generally and fully in the knowledge of religious truth and duty, in a few random discourses, however elaborately prepared, or fervidly delivered.

While I honor the zeal, and I trust, duly appreciate the useful labors of evangelists and other itinerant preachers, I am clearly satisfied that an itinerant ministry can never be substituted for a settled one without great detriment to the interests of religion. And this I think is a growing conviction in the land. It is a conviction not diminished, but rather increased, by our recent increased experience of the results and tendencies of itinerant labors.

It was formerly the practice of our churches to settle their ministers for life. The same is the practice now

to some extent; but the times are given to change. The practice of dismissing a minister "for every cause" is one of the sins of the times. It is an evil to all concerned, but more to the people than to the minister. Its tendency is to unsettle the habits, and, in various ways, to diminish the prosperity of our churches. Every instance of dismissing one minister and settling another causes some to be dissatisfied, if it do not produce division and defection. It has an effect, too, to multiply itching ears, and to induce a habit of curious and speculative hearing, rather than of sober profiting by the word. It will be found by observation that those societies are most prosperous which are least addicted to a frequent change of ministers.

It belongs to the present chapter to speak of the powers and prerogatives of the minister.

His duties towards the people as their spiritual instructor and pastor are too well known to need to be specified. Almost equally obvious are the duties of the people towards him.

He is entitled to their esteem and confidence; to a remembrance in their prayers; to an adequate subsistence;* to a respectful attendance on his ministrations: for where Christ has made it his duty to preach, he has made it theirs to hear. In a word, as it is for him to labor and watch for them, so it is for them to acknowledge,

*1 Thess. v. 12, 13, 25. 1 Tim. v. 18.

sustain, and co-operate with him, in every way in which they may give efficacy and comfort to his ministry.

Though it is not the province of the pastor to *govern* the church as a magistrate, or legislator, yet he is not destitute of *authority*. He has the authority of a spiritual guide and overseer. He has authority as Christ's ambassador, and commissioned expounder of his will ; and as such the people are bound to respect him. I cannot express myself more happily on this subject than in the following language of Mr. James.

“ Still, however, there is authority belonging to the pastor ; for office without authority is a solecism. “ Remember them that have the *rule over you*,” said St. Paul to the Hebrews, xiii. 7. “ *Obey* them that have the *rule over you*. *Submit* yourselves, for they watch for your souls,” 17. “ They addicted themselves to the ministry ; *submit* yourselves to such.” 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. These are inspired injunctions, and they enjoin *obedience* and *submission* on Christian churches to their pastors. The authority of pastors, however, is not legislative or coercive, but simply declarative and executive. To define with precision its limits, is as difficult as to mark the boundaries of the several colours of the rainbow, or of light and darkness at the hour of twilight in the hemisphere. The minister is to command, yet he is not to “ lord it over God's heritage.” This is not the only case, in which the precise limits of authority are left undefined by the scriptures. The du-

ties of the conjugal union are laid down in the same general manner: the husband is to rule and the wife to obey; yet it is difficult to declare where in this instance authority and submission end. In each of these instances the union is founded on mutual love, confidence and esteem, and it might therefore be rationally supposed, that under these circumstances general terms are sufficient, and that there would arise no contests for power. If the people see that all the authority of their pastor is employed for their benefit, they will not be inclined to ascertain by measurement whether he has passed its limits. The very circumstance of his prerogative being thus undefined, should on the one hand make *him* afraid of *extending* it, and on the other, render his church cautious of *diminishing* it.”*

I will only add, that whatever the pastor's authority may be, in kind or measure, according to the scriptures, it is doubtless graduated to the ends which the ministry is designed to accomplish. It is such authority as is requisite to the highest and best effect of the office; and either to exalt it beyond its proper measure, or to depress it below, is inauspicious, perhaps *alike* inauspicious, to the welfare of the churches. If in the one case there is a usurpation of the rights of the brotherhood, there is, in the other, that want of respect for the office which nullifies its influence. “Those persons who are anxious to strip their pastors of all just eleva-

*Church Member's Guide.

tion, (says the author quoted above,) cannot expect to derive much edification from their labors ; for instruction and advice, like substances falling to the earth, impress the mind with a momentum proportioned to the height from which they descend."

A minister's *reputation* is to be regarded not less than his authority. His character is the property of his people ; and is of the greatest importance to them. To assail and injure that, is to assail and injure them. If they themselves assail it injuriously, they are digging through the walls of their own dwelling.

A minister beloved and respected by his people is one of their strongest bonds of union. United in him, they are united in one another. It is observable that when enemies would assail a church, or society, the minister is commonly their most prominent object of attack. To undermine *his* influence, to get the people dissatisfied or divided with regard to him, is an important step towards the accomplishment of their designs. In like manner, when sectarians invade, their policy is to cry down your minister and extol their own.

A people wrong their minister by expecting too much from him. They should remember that to *preach* is his great duty ; and that it were better that he should fail in any other particular than in this. All other duties, however important, are less important than this. It were well if he could *visit* all the time, and study and

preach abundantly besides. But this cannot be. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. He cannot go beyond the capabilities of flesh and blood. I do by no means underrate the importance of out-of-pulpit duties. Every minister should find time, if possible, to see his people at their homes. But of the two, if instructive preaching and frequent pastoral visitation cannot be united, give me the *studious* minister, rather than the visiting one.

Injustice is often done to a minister by his people comparing him with others, particularly with itinerant preachers. An evangelist, having perfected a few discourses by preaching them a hundred times, and enriching them with every new and striking thought that has occurred to him, and with affecting anecdotes collected in his travels, must of course preach in an uncommon manner;* especially when his fame precedes him, and produces "erect ears" and an expectant prepossession in his favor.

When such a preacher retires from a place, his admiring auditors not unfrequently begin to turn and look upon their own humble pastor as a tame and ordinary man. The great meteor goes down, and in the darkness which succeeds, the poor candle, instead of shining brighter

* It was in this way that even Whitfield perfected his discourses and gave them their ultimate effect, eloquent as he naturally was. See his life by Southey.

in its socket, looks duller than before. It dwindles to a taper. "Where are the talents and the zeal of our own and surrounding ministers, compared with such a preacher as he that has been among us!"

Now there is an illusion here which ought to be dissipated. Take this wonderful Apollos and make him *stationary*; compel him to sustain all the cares and various monotonous labors of the settled pastor, and in the same pulpit from year to year to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old, like "every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom;" bind him with the seven green withs of parish duty, and cut off the seven locks of his itinerating fame, and then shall he be weak, and be as another man. He could not *always* preach the same exciting story-fraught discourses. Nor indeed would this be desirable. It would not be profitable if it were practicable. As for laboriousness and zeal, it does not require, nor does it *show*, as much of either, to go, as the revivalist does, from one exciting scene and temporary field to another, repeating the same prepared discourses, without oppressive care or sense of responsibility, and with liberty to preach or forbear preaching, as strength or convenience may dictate, as it does to be ever sustaining the ceaseless, noiseless round of parish labors.

I do not say these things in the least to disparage itinerant preachers, certainly not *all* of them; there are some that cannot be commended. I believe that the Lord has honored them in the conversion of many souls; and have reason to know how welcome their labors

are in times too arduous and interesting for a pastor's single strength. But I think that justice to all concerned requires thus much to be said.

There are certain prerogatives which are conceded to the pastor, in all denominations. Among these is his right to the occupancy of his own pulpit. It is for him to regulate his own exchanges, and to say whether any preacher shall preach in his place or not. It is proper indeed that he should regard the reasonable wishes of his people, as he naturally will ; but for them to assume the business of introducing another into his pulpit against or without his consent, is an invasion of his rights as a pastor. Suppose a Socinian or other errorist arrives among you, and by authority of your society's committee, or by vote of an inconsiderate or clamorous majority, he gains the admission which he seeks ; and entering into your minister's place and fold, " brings in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them ;" whose " pernicious ways" many are likely to follow, and " by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Would you judge of your minister's feelings in such a case, you may consider what your own would be, to see an enemy traversing your field with tares. It is beneath the character of a minister to share his pulpit with those who preach another gospel, and pull down what he builds up.

It does not much alter the case if the intruder be orthodox. He is a preacher, suppose, of another denom-

ination, or a traveling one of your own, whose piety is not questioned, and whose labors in other places are extolled in the newspapers ; still there may be reasons, and sufficient ones, in the mind of your pastor, for not inviting him into the pulpit.*

If it be wrong to *force* his admission, it is wrong to compass the same thing by such *importunity*, or intimations of displeasure, as the pastor will not choose to withstand. It may be proper to express your wishes to him, but beyond this you should leave the matter to him. When you called him to be your pastor you committed to him the spiritual oversight of the society. You confided in him as a good and faithful man. If you have ceased to repose such confidence in him, it is better that the connexion be dissolved than that you invade his rights. He may err in given cases and good be prevented ; but as a general thing, depend upon it, more evil will result from the course which is here objected to.

The pulpit is a sacred public interest which must be intrusted to somebody. If it be intrusted to the pastor, as the known and universal practice, the people will

*As the Pastor has a right to judge in the case, so he is commonly the best judge. I have in mind several instances of preachers who not long ago were urged upon ministers as zealous and successful revivalists, and by some were reluctantly received, to satisfy their people, and by others were with constancy refused, who are now preachers of a notorious fanatical heresy.

generally be satisfied. But if it be assumed by others, dissatisfaction on the part of some, if not division, will be the consequence.

Nor can the blessing of God be expected on the labors of a preacher so obtruded into the place of another; nor is the preacher himself, who will do this, worthy of common respect.

What is here said of the pulpit is applicable also to the lecture-room, and to any place which the pastor stately occupies, and where his people are expected to be the auditors.

Of the same kind is the right of the pastor to be advised with in regard to any private meeting, which it may be proposed to set up by the members of the church. It is but due respect to him that he should know of such meetings, and how and by whom they are to be conducted. I speak of meetings where the attendance is promiscuous, and teaching or exhortation a leading exercise. In the case of meetings for retired social prayer it is not so important, though in that case it may be well, and encouraging to the pastor, to let him know of them.

On the other hand, in relation to the same subject, there are certain things which *the people* have a right to expect from *him*. If they have committed the trusts of the pastoral office to him, he may not, as it appears to me, resign those trusts to another. To make my meaning obvious, I will suppose that in a time of special

attention to religion he is assisted by a stranger ; and that this stranger, bringing his own novelties with him, assumes that he knows better than the pastor what ought to be done, and acts accordingly. He takes it upon him to direct what meetings shall be held, what measures adopted, who and how many shall be admitted to the church, how soon they shall be admitted, and the like. Now can the pastor, consistently with his duty, can he consistently with the trusts reposed in him by the people that called him, and the council that ordained him, stand aside from his office, and give up the reins to this stranger? If the field has been committed to *his* keeping, may he consign it to another? May he let Samson's foxes into it, to work what mischiefs they may? I trow not. And I do not wonder at the complaints which have been made on this subject in some places. "Our minister, (said a gentleman from a populous town in the West,) is a good man, and a good preacher; we all respect him; but he has given up his society so entirely to certain extravagant preachers lately, that numbers are getting disgusted, and are gone and going to other societies." A minister certainly should have the privilege of calling in assistance when it is necessary; but he ought ever to maintain his place as a pastor, and never resign up his judgment and hand over his parish to others.

CHAPTER VII.

DEACONS.

THE office of Deacons was first instituted, as is generally thought, Acts vi. 1—6.

The qualifications of the men who are to fill the office are, as mentioned at the time of its institution, that they be “men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom ;” that is, of unblemished reputation, distinguished piety, and judgment ; and more particularly, 1 Tim. iii. 8—10 ; “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre ; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved ; then let them use the office of deacon, being found blameless.” Which may be paraphrased thus ; grave, sincere, temperate, not avaricious, of thorough knowledge of the truth and sincerely attached to it, and of tried and established worth. It is also added that they should be men who “rule their children and their own houses well.” These are the qualities which churches are bound to seek in a candidate for the office, and this is the character which every deacon should endeavor to sustain.

Their duties are these :

1. To receive and distribute the alms of the church. This was the service to which they were specially ap-

pointed at the first. It is commonly assigned to them in our churches.

2. To distribute the bread and wine of the Lord's supper.

3. To act, in some respects, as assistants and substitutes to the pastor. In the pastor's absence they preside at the meetings of the church; and when there is no preacher, they conduct its worship.

They are to have some prominence among the brethren in things pertaining to edification, as teachers and leaders. This is argued from their required qualifications, particularly from their being required to be men of more than ordinary piety and knowledge of the truth.

"I see no reason why deacons should be required to be such as *hold the mystery of the faith*, a direction given concerning bishops, Tit. i. 9, unless this qualification was to be employed in some manner and degree, for the same ends. In a bishop this qualification is required, that *he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince gain-sayers*. There is undoubtedly no warrant given to deacons in the Scriptures to preach. But there are a multitude of religious instructions, of very great importance, which are to be given to many persons, and on many occasions, and which are still remote from preaching. Of these the most formal is that class of instructions which are appropriately styled catechetical. Another class is made up of the teaching immediately given in private religious assemblies. Another still may be sufficiently de-

scribed by the word *occasional*. In all these it would seem that deacons might with great propriety to act : and unless they were to act in these, or some other similar modes, it seems difficult to explain why they should be required to possess skill and soundness in the gospel.”*

From its being a part of their office to distribute the charities of the church to the afflicted poor, it seems peculiarly proper in them to be much in the habit of visiting that class of persons, for the purposes of sympathy and prayer with them, and of seeking them out and reporting their wants to the church.

In regard to the manner of their introduction into office,

1. They are to be chosen by the church. Acts vi. 3, 5.

2. They are then to be set apart to the office by prayer and imposition of hands. This was originally done, Acts vi. 6; and there appears to be no good reason why the apostolic practice should not be followed by us.

Such being the place and qualifications of Deacons in the church, they are to be treated with that respect which is due to such an office.

As a general fact the Deacons of the New England churches have in a good degree possessed the qualifica-

* Dr. Dwight.

tions which are required. They have been men distinguished for their sobriety, probity, and general excellence of character. The matter is proverbial.

But as there are exceptions in every class of men, there must of course be some in this. We cannot always tell what a man will prove to be in a new situation. There are some people, it is proverbially said, who cannot bear promotion. We sometimes say to one who has hitherto been humble and unassuming, "Friend go up higher;" but "in the highest room," he becomes another man. Elated with his advancement, he expects to "have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with him."

A certain minister, whose experience had been more than ordinarily unfortunate perhaps, said that "There never was a difficulty but there was a Deacon in it." The remark was quite too sweeping to be just: so far from its being true that *all* our church difficulties originate with Deacons, it is a general fact that they are eminently instrumental in preventing and healing them. But instances have occurred in which these servants of the church have affected more of the consequence than of the humility of their office, and proved but troublesome assistants.

CHAPTER VIII.

RELIGIOUS MEETINGS.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

It is susceptible of proof from the Scriptures that the public worship of God on the Sabbath, is a duty no less obligatory than the keeping of the Sabbath itself. He who sanctified the day, sanctified it to certain uses. Among these the services of the sanctuary are prominent. To neglect these services, therefore, is to mispend the day, however else the time may be occupied; for it is spending it otherwise than God has appointed.

If it be asked, then, what are the circumstances which may excuse or detain us from the public worship of the Sabbath, the answer is, they are those which release us from keeping the *rest* of the Sabbath, or from abstaining from labor, namely, works of necessity and mercy; which some reduce, and perhaps correctly, to works of mercy alone. We may be absent from public worship when our own or another's sufferings or necessities, make it a work of mercy to attend to them. In such a case God will have mercy and not sacrifice. But to be absent for any other cause, even upon a pious pretence of greater improvement by reading and meditation at home, is an unauthorized manner of spending the day. "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, *and reverence my sanc-*

tuary: I am the Lord.”* He that stays at home to read his Bible, or better sermons than he would hear at church, may thank God that he is not as others are, riding, working, or sleeping; but he cannot thank him that he is keeping the Sabbath as God would have him.

Our first duty then, with regard to public worship, is our personal attendance; and if we have families, to see that they attend. We should also draw as many others thither as we can. As far as we may without offence, we should invite our indifferent or slothful neighbors. It will often take but a word to turn their feet to the sanctuary. The practice of inviting our neighbors thus is no new thing. “I was glad (says David,) when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

“A minister (says Mr. James,) cannot himself ask people to attend his place of worship, but those who are in the habit of hearing him can; and it is astonishing to what an extent the usefulness of private Christians may be carried in this way. I have receive very many into the fellowship of the church under my care, who were first brought under the sound of the gospel by the kind solicitations of a pious neighbor. *To draw away the hearers of one faithful preacher to another*, is a despicable ambition—mere sectarian zeal; but to invite those who never hear the gospel to listen to the joyful sound, is an effort worthy the mind of an angel. Shall

* Levit. xix. 30.

sinners invite one another to iniquity—to the brothel, the theater, the tavern—and Christians not attempt to draw them to the house of God? This is one way in which every member, of every church, may be the means of doing great good; the rich, the poor, male and female, masters and servants, young and old, have all some acquaintance over whom they may exert their influence; and how can it be better employed than in attracting them to those places

“Where streams of heavenly mercy flow,
And words of sweet salvation sound.”

Every church should endeavor that no family or individual within its limits should neglect public worship, till invitation and persuasion had been tried in vain.

THE WEEKLY CONFERENCE, OR EVENING LECTURE.

The Christian should attend these meetings for his own benefit. They are an important means of grace to him, as well as of conversion to the impenitent. They recall him from the world; they vivify his faith, and enliven his affections; they keep his lamp burning. He that neglects all religious opportunities save those of the Sabbath, is commonly but a cold traveler in the ways of God.

He should attend them as an encouragement to others. Many appear to imagine that our evening lectures are designed for the unconverted alone. They are not for them exclusively; and if they were, for that very

reason ought Christians to attend them ; first, that they may draw the unconverted thither, who are likely to be influenced by their example, whether it draw *to* or *from* the meeting ; and secondly, that they may increase the numbers, and the peculiar interest which numbers give. Every one knows what a full meeting is, in respect to interest and impression, in comparison with one which is meagre and thin. There is a deepening solemnity, there is a swelling and contagious sympathy, in the thronged meeting, to which the other is a stranger, though the exercises be the same. This kind of interest is the more important as it concerns the unrenewed. The Christian finds an inherent interest in all religious exercises, whether there be few or many present ; which the unrenewed does not find. It needs the aid of impressive circumstances to fix his attention and interest his feelings.

The Christian should be present at these meetings to bless them with his prayers, and, if need be, to aid them with his gifts, especially in singing. Singing has so much to do with our sympathies, that an evening meeting suffers incredibly where this exercise is wanting. This part of our evening worship should not be left to depend on the Sabbath choir exclusively : it will often fail if it do. The church should have its own evening choir ; or rather should be itself a choir, prepared to sing on all occasions. Let all sing that can ; and let the place be filled with melody. How lamentable it is, and, I am afraid, how sinful, that so many of our members

to whom God has given sweet voices, and melody of heart too, to which the music of pious song owes its best effect, should so neglect the gift! Christian—you that can sing but seldom do, how can you answer it to God? Who gave you the melody of your voice, and to what purpose did he give it? Let *all* your powers be used for God.

It is important to the interest of the evening meeting, as it is of every other, that the place itself where it is held should be made cheerful and attractive. It should be well warmed in winter and well aired in summer, and well *lighted*. A meeting suffers more than most people are aware by being held in a dim and cavern-like room; where only a lamp or two dimly illumines the locks of the speaker, whose hearers abide in darkness. We are by nature strongly affected by the scenery about us. The cold, the gloomy, the dark, the cheerful and bright, the silent and the stirring, impart their qualities to our feelings. The children of this world understand this; and it is one of the things in which they are practically wiser than the children of light. How does the ball-room surpass the lecture-room, and the theater the church for brilliancy of illumination? The primitive Christians, poor and distressed, and few as they were, gave the cheerfulness of bright lights to their meetings. When Paul was preaching at Troas, “there were *many lights* in the upper chamber in which they were gathered together.”

THE SOCIAL PRAYER MEETING.

As these are often conducted by brethren without the Pastor, I shall be excused for a few suggestions.

There should be some one to take the lead in them. It belongs to the deacons, if present.

They should begin at the hour ; else some will be long waiting before others arrive. No time is so tediously wasted as that which is wasted in *waiting* ; whether it be waiting for the morning, for the stage, for the wind, or for tardy brethren at a meeting.

Let the prayers be short. In order to this, let them be simple, not embracing too many things. Err on the side of brevity. Some are accustomed to request the individual that leads in prayer to confine himself to a given subject. This is too artificial, and is often embarrassing to the "slow of speech." However, as there are commonly some subjects more immediately before the meeting than others, the member that prays should endeavor to pray for those things, rather than for every thing besides. If we are met to pray for the heathen, it is not necessary in the same petition to pray for rain.

The meeting, as to its length, should be confined within given limits. Then the mother will know beforehand whether she can leave her family so long ; the invalid will know if his strength is sufficient ; and so of others, whose circumstances might allow of their going for an hour, perhaps, but not for several hours. Short and animated meetings are better than protracted and

drowsy ones. An hour, or an hour and a half, is long enough in ordinary states of religion.

The social prayer meeting among Congregationalists is coeval with the denomination. This and the evening lecture they have ever valued as the most powerful means of religion next to the Sabbath. "It is usual among us, (says Cotton Mather, a century and a half ago,) for Christians to uphold private meetings, wherein they do, with various exercises, edify one another; and it is not easy to reckon up the varieties used in them. It is observed that the power of godliness ordinarily prevails in a place, as the private meetings are duly kept up and carried on."

There are churches of my acquaintance, and the same may be said of many, if not of most of the churches of Connecticut, and perhaps of New England, whose weekly prayer meetings have been continued from beyond the memory of the living. And the history of them has been the history of religion in the place. They have ebbed and flowed with numbers, and waxed and waned in interest, as the church has passed through successive seasons of revival and declension. Often some private room has held the constant few that attended them, and often the church itself has been too strait for them.

Female prayer meetings have been common in our churches, and have been greatly blessed.

Of the *lecture preparatory* to the communion, the *monthly concert*, and the occasional *church fast*, I shall say no more than that they are seasons which the conscientious will not feel at liberty to neglect, nor the heavenly minded be willing to lose.

Respecting religious meetings generally, public and private, it may be said that they are that upon which, not only the life of religion, but the external prosperity of the society itself mainly depends. In proportion as these are kept up, in numbers and in spirit, the power of religion is felt, vice is awed, division and decay prevented, and accessions gained. He therefore that will be true to the body, will, as a *practical church member*, no less than as a devoted Christian, sustain, with constancy and fervor, its religious meetings.

CHAPTER IX.

MEASURES FOR THE PROMOTION OF RELIGION.

THE cause of religion being committed, under God, to human hands, the measures by which it is to be promoted are left, to some extent, to be determined by human wisdom. What *doctrines* we are to preach, and what *ordinances* to observe, the scriptures have fully instructed us ; and we have general instructions, and some specific ones, in regard to *measures* ; but not so detailed and full as to leave nothing to men.

The Congregational churches, while they have been distinguished, and even proverbial, for their general love of order, both in church and state, have never thought it necessary to keep to one exact system of measures, but have wisely availed themselves of any measures which appeared to be judicious and not unscriptural.

Often, in low states of religion, they have deemed it necessary to 'break up their fallow ground : ' and in addition to the usual services of the Sabbath and the week, have appointed special seasons of prayer and fasting, with serious visiting of families, and other movements. Such measures on the part of our churches have been greatly blessed of God in times innumerable. Thousands have from them dated their hope of eternal life. In times of special attention, more frequent and pro-

tracted public services, and more abundant labors of every kind have been deemed important.

There has been much discussion latterly about what are called "new measures;" such, namely, as protracted meetings, the public "anxious seat," female speaking in promiscuous assemblies, with certain strains of preaching and praying.

I have not the presumption to think myself able to settle the matters at issue should I attempt it. I have looked at the subject with a conviction that some of the evils, seen and feared, are obvious enough to all but the authors of them, and that others are magnified by an over-cautious timidity; and that whatever the evils are, they are likely to receive a speedier and healthier cure by being left to the good sense and private correction of the churches than by a public controversy, protracted, and vague, and irresponsible, and in other respects not always happy, in the newspapers.

Meantime there are a few plain observations, which I may be permitted to make respecting *all extraordinary* measures, whether 'new' or 'old.'

1. A wise man will neither receive nor reject a measure simply because it is *new*. But being new, he will not adopt it hastily; nor be deceived by its supposed success in places where it has been tried. He will look at the remote and settled tendencies of things, as well as at immediate apparent effects. Many a revival regarded as wonderful at the time, the preaching and

measures being all of a novel and exciting character, has proved but chaff in the end ; or worse still, a field burnt over. " Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." There is such a thing as a solemn revival of religion produced by the Spirit of God ; the fruits of which shall appear to his glory in the final day. Of this let none be incredulous. And doubtless there are such things as spurious religious *excitements*, the results of which will also appear. Why should there not be spurious *revivals* as well as spurious *conversions*, which nobody questions ; and why are not the former to be expected and guarded against, as well as the latter ?

2. It is a matter of experience, however it be explained, that novel measures, and especially *very* novel ones, do not bear repeating. The " church conferences" which were practised extensively a few years since in Connecticut and some other parts of New England, and were attended with striking effects at the first, were attended with little or none on being repeated.*

* These " conferences" were composed of pastors and delegates, or in some instances, of delegates alone, from some twelve or fifteen neighboring churches to each church in rotation. Reports were given on the state of religion, accompanied with prayers and exhortations, and sometimes with a solemn renewal of covenant on the part of the church visited. A part of two days was spent in these exercises. The delegates returning made report of what they had seen and heard to their re-

The same has been true, I believe, as a general thing, of "protracted meetings."

The explanation is perhaps not difficult.

First; Viewing these measures apart from the agency of God, there is a novelty in them, in the first instance, which attracts the notice of people and draws them together. Then the unwonted numbers which are seen assembling, and the strangeness of many among them who do not use to be seen in religious places, but like the excited hearers of John, have come out for once, as if warned to flee from the wrath to come, produces naturally a solemn expectation that God is about to revive his work. Wonder and solemnity, abstraction from the world, the pervading sympathy of a great congregation, and deep and expectant attention, prepare the ground for the seed which is about to be sown. But on a repetition of the measure, the novelty is wanting, the audience few, and the impression faint.

Secondly; That diffidence of means and instruments, that humble and earnest looking to God, that trembling sense of responsibility, which Christians manifested in the first instance, are too apt to be exchanged, in the second, for a vain reliance on the means themselves;

spective churches. The effects were apparently great and happy, but not unmixed with evil. *Union prayer meetings* have been held with similar effects. In these a few neighboring churches meet, not by delegates, but as many as can. Prayers, exhortations, a sermon, and the Lord's supper, are the usual exercises.

which having been once successful, are expected to be so again.

Thirdly ; God does not see fit to add his blessing. If it be asked why ? it is safe to answer, the reasons are best known to himself. Even so ; for so it seemeth good in his sight. Perhaps the reason lies in the altered feelings of Christians, mentioned, above, in their looking to their own arrangements rather than to him. Perhaps it is because his manner is to observe the laws of the human mind in his operations, and it does not follow that because a particular measure is adapted to the human mind, or to the existing state of religious feeling in a place, at one time, it is so adapted at another time. The probability is that it is not : so far as the effect depends on novelty, it is *certain* that it is not.

But fourthly, and as probable a reason as any,—if it be not irreverent to inquire on such a subject,—perhaps he withholds his Spirit lest we should come to make greater account of means of our own devising than of his institutions ; and rely rather on our own novel and exciting arrangements than upon his Spirit. In proportion as we look for the conversion of sinners only in connexion with occasional and extraordinary movements, we are in danger of growing remiss and faithless in the all important stated services of the Sabbath, and other ordinary means of grace. Thus our religion would become a religion of times and seasons,—a series of alternate short excitements and long declensions, instead of a settled habit and a regular growth. And

thus our Savior's instructive and beautiful image of "a city that is set on an hill," always visible, might be changed for a city hid in the desert, or sunk in the shades of a valley, and seen only in the light of an occasional conflagration.

I do not say that unusual measures are never to be repeated, or that this is never successful; but it is to be done with judgment.

3. Whatever special measures we may resort to at times, our *habitual and main reliance* should be upon the *stated and ordinary* means of grace. Especially, should we look to *the Sabbath and the preaching of the Sabbath*, as the great means appointed of God for the salvation of men. The Sabbath with its appropriate services is set apart for the special purpose of promoting religion; and though God may bless other judicious and prayerful endeavors of his people, it is not to be supposed that he will forsake his own appointments to follow theirs; or that he will honor human arrangements above his hallowed day. It was the Sabbath which God hallowed from the beginning of time. It was the Sabbath when Christ rose from the dead. The Sabbath is "the Lord's day." It was devoted by Christ and his apostles, in an especial manner, to public preaching. "As *his custom was*, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read."—"And Paul, *as his manner was*, went in unto them, and three *SABBATH days* reasoned with them out

of the Scriptures.”—And he reasoned in the synagogues *every Sabbath*, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.* It was on the *Sabbath*, the day of pentecost—that the Spirit of God was poured out in a most wonderful manner, and three thousand were converted.† More souls have been converted, probably, and will be, to the end of time, by means of the *Sabbath* than by whatever means beside. There is a solemnity, a sacredness, about the *Sabbath*, above every other season, which gives peculiar weight to the word dispensed, and is eminently favorable above other and more exciting occasions, to those distinct, calm, and conscience-reaching impressions, which ever belong to a genuine work of grace. What Cowper says of the *pulpit* may be said of the *Sabbath pulpit* pre-eminently :

I say the pulpit, *in the sober use,*
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers,
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
The most important, and effectual, guard,
Support, and ornament, of virtue's cause.

To the *Sabbath* then, should our thoughts, our prayers, our hopes, habitually turn for the reviving of God's work. On other endeavors we may indeed expect his blessing ; but let us beware, in looking to these, that we do not suffer ourselves insensibly to undervalue the *Sabbath*. I fear there is too common a tendency to this. Let us beware how we induce or encourage an

* Luke iv. 16—22. Acts xvii. 2 ; xviii. 4.

† See Gurney on the *Sabbath*, Chap. 4.

impression, that the Sabbath and its services are but an ordinary thing—a matter of course,—from which little effect is to be looked for ; and that sinners are not to be converted, and the church built up, except in connexion with certain extraordinary men or measures.

4. It is in revivals of religion, beginning or in progress, commonly, that objectionable measures are introduced. The extravagances of religion are never committed in low states of feeling. It is in these seasons, therefore, that we ought to be specially guarded. If ever we should keep our coolest judgment in exercise, and all that we do be well and prayerfully considered,—if ever preaching should be plain and full of instructive truth, if ever prayer should be reverent and simple, and exhortation coherent and lucid, however impassioned, if ever our meetings should be still, it is in such seasons of awakening, when God is with us and every mind is alive to every movement.

I for one, am in favor of as bold expedients for rousing the attention of men, and for enforcing truth upon them, as the bible and common sense will justify. And I have but a moderate share of sympathy—perhaps too little—with some alarmed ministers and churches, who, because some ill-balanced heads and heated spirits have gone too fast and fallen into ruinous disorders, think it safe to retire into the opposite cold extreme, and maintain a cautious position in regard to all revivals. I would indeed err with the latter sooner than with the

former,—with the over-prudent rather than with the rash. But it is wise to err with neither. Paul was neither a Jehu nor a man that stood all day in the market place. He did not give up the cause of Christ because some carried it to fanatical extremes. He neither stood still in his labors, nor abated at all the energy and boldness of his preaching, nor slackened at all his exhortations to the churches to be active and faithful, on account of the abuses of the times ; which were at least as many and as afflicting in those days as in these.

In all our “revival measures” and revival meetings it is important to remember of what materials the mass of the community is composed ;—how much ignorance, especially of religion,—which is hid, not to the vulgar only, but to the wise and prudent ; how much prejudice and enmity ; how much willing self delusion. Let us consider how many passions there are in the mass of human bosoms, which have nothing to do with religion, but which are susceptible of being excited by religious means ; and how prepared many are, ‘by reason of darkness’ to be led into deeper darkness ; and to “fall from grace” which they never had, into that last state which is worse than the first,—by means of a temporary, perhaps permanent delusion.

Let us consider too, what is the true nature of religion, and religious exercises. Our object is, under God, to convert men. What is conversion ? One of the exercises involved in such a change is repentance for sin ; in order to which the subject must *be shown*

his sin: for how will he repent of sin except he *see* his sin? Another is faith in Christ; in order to which Christ in his proper character and relations must be set before him, as "the way, the truth, and the life." He needs *instruction*, then, in religious truth. How is this imparted to him? Not by noise, or extravagance of any kind; not by denunciation; not by exhortation, even, however fervid: but by an intelligible exhibition of the word of God addressed to the understanding, and carried to the heart and conscience by suitable appeals. Men must become Christians *intelligently*; or whatever else religion may make them, it will not make them Christians. *Knowledge* of truth is essential to *belief* of truth.

The first thing in "winning souls" is to excite attention, and gain a hearing. This done, the less of novelty there is to divert the mind, and the less of sympathy or vague excitement, to deceive the heart, the more probable it is, that conversions will be genuine, and the revival long continued.

There is no need of extravagances. We may be very zealous without confusion, and very ardent and not be mad. Men can hear as distinctly, reflect as calmly, think as deeply, resolve as intelligently, weep as freely, rejoice as truly, in the midst of an orderly silence, as amidst the many waters of a tumultuous assembly. "There is no need of praying as if God and man were deaf, or of wallowing on the floor, and frothing at the mouth, as if filled with hydrophobia, instead of the Spirit of God; nor any harm in kindness and gentle-

ness; nor any benefit in harsh and severe epithets. The state of man may be explained to him so that he shall believe and feel, better than by calling him a devil, a viper, or a serpent. There may be as great directness as is needed, or as is possible, without indecorum; and the gospel may be preached faithfully, and attended with the power of God, without groaning in prayer, and crying "Amen," and without female prayers and exhortations, and without that spiritual pride, which never fails to attend pressing the mass of the community out of their place, and shaking together in one chaldron of effervescence, all the passions of all the classes in human society."*

But while I remark, and quote thus, it is due to truth to observe, that these things have not been characteristic of New England revivals. The revivals of New England have, with few exceptions, been remarkable for order and stillness, for pungency of conviction, and for abiding fruits. A stranger would be struck with nothing so much as the Sabbath stillness that pervaded them; which he would perceive in the assemblies, in the streets, in the shops, and everywhere. May the ever continue thus.

5. There are some objectionable practices, which require some notice here.

* Beecher's letter to Beman on the "Western Revivals."

LAY PREACHING.

There is an order of men specially set apart to the work of teaching and preaching. Their duties and qualifications are made the subject of careful instructions in the scriptures. It must therefore be wrong for other men, not qualified and ordained, to assume their place. At the same time, there are certainly some things to be done by laymen. The injunctions, to 'do good,' to 'bear fruit,' to be 'always abounding in the work of the Lord,' are to laymen as well as to ministers; and plainly teach that there is active service for *them*. Moreover; action is important to *health*, spiritual as well as bodily. They cannot be very growing and lively Christian, who *do* nothing, actively, for Christ's cause.

"An angel's wing would tire if long at rest,
And God, *inactive*, were no longer blest."

But it is difficult to draw precisely *the line* where the forwardness of the laymen begins to trench upon the appropriate duties of the minister. What *is* lay-preaching? The question was put to a meeting of ministers, who answered somewhat hesitatingly and variously. Is it wrong for the brethren to *pray* together? to *exhort* one another? to *read and comment on the bible* together, for their common edification? No. Is it wrong for a layman to warn the impenitent? to reprove sin? or even to address a promiscuous assembly on the concerns of their souls? No: it were to be wished that pious lay-

men, would abound, according to their gifts and acceptableness, in all these things more than they do. But it is agreed, I suppose by all, that for an unordained, or unlicensed man to *take a text*, or larger passage of scripture, and make a formal discourse from it, whether in a pulpit or in a private room, would make him a preaching layman. It does not alter the case materially, whether he be a private brother, or an unlicensed student in divinity, or whether he be gifted, or otherwise : so long as he is not *regularly authorized*, he is out of his province. Further ; for a laymen to give out his own appointments, except perhaps, with the approbation and under the eye of the pastor,—and expect the people to attend where he is to take the lead, and in all things except a text, or a sermon, to speak and act as a minister does, would generally be thought, I suppose, to be going beyond his line.

The bible addresses ministers respecting their duties thus : “ *Preach the word ;—reprove,—rebuke,—exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*” “ *These things command and teach :*” i. e. *teach authoritatively*, as men authorized to speak and be heard.—“ *Charging them before the Lord &c.*” “ *Rightly dividing the word of truth &c.*”

From these instructions to ministers—to take no notice of the instructions which are given to the people—we must infer that for those who are not ministers to “ *preach the word,*” or in any manner to teach or speak

authoritatively, or with any appearance of eminence above their brethren, is improper. Let every brother use his gifts and influence to the best he can, for the glory of God and the good of man ; but let him do it with becoming modesty, as an uncommissioned disciple, and as claiming no more for himself than an equality with his brethren.

It cannot be difficult, I think, for piety and good sense, with a proper attention to the Bible, to discern where, or about where, the line of propriety runs. Meantime the line exists, and is of great importance. Let all distinction of duties be done away between minister and people, and ‘confusion,’ if not ‘envying and strife’ and ‘every evil work,’ must be the consequence.

It was such confusion among the Corinthian Christians, all ambitious of exhibiting their gifts, that Paul reprobated by demanding, Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?

FEMALE PRAYING, OR SPEAKING, IN PROMISCUOUS ASSEMBLIES.

What are our objections to this practice?

1. It is *expressly forbidden in scripture*. “Let your women keep silence in the churches : for it is not permitted unto them to speak ; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husband at home : for it is a shame for women to speak in the

church.”* 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35. “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

Respecting the first of these passages, it is to be noticed, that the apostle is upon the very business of correcting disorderly practices in Christian assemblies ; and he mentions females’ speaking as one of these practices, and unequivocally disallows it. And of the other passage it is to be observed, that it occurs in an express *letter of instructions* to Timothy as a minister, and to all ministers. The *design*, therefore, of both these passages is as obvious as the language is explicit.

How is it possible to misunderstand an injunction so plain and so repeated ! “I know (says one) that these texts have been explained away ; but so have the proof texts which teach the divinity of Christ, the depravity of man, the reality of the atonement, and the necessity of regeneration. Any thing may be explained away by those who are determined to obey their own will instead of the Bible.”

Let us attend to the *reason* which the apostle

*The word *church*, in the New Testament, does not mean a public assembly in a synagogue, or house of worship like ours, merely, but it often means such small assemblies as met in private houses, and ‘upper rooms.’ “Salute Nymphas, and the church which is in his house ;” that is the church which meets at his house. Col. iv. 15.—See also Rom. xvi. 5. Philem. 2 ; and the New Testament everywhere.

gives. He says ‘it is a *shame* for a woman to speak,’ on account of her relation to the other sex, or her place in society. In the passage in Timothy he gives the same reason coupled with another, namely, the proper *modesty* of her sex. He evidently means to imply that it is unbecoming for females to be so forward as to speak in promiscuous assemblies, for the same reason that certain styles of dress are unbecoming. Read the passage in its connexion. “In like manner also, that woman adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shame-facedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence &c. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression.” 1 Tim. ii. 9—14.

The propriety of this reason of the apostle has been universally felt and acted upon by mankind; in refined nations, as well as in barbarous. They have universally felt that it is unsuited to the modesty of woman to speak in public assemblies. The *bar* excludes her; so do the *legislature*, and the *popular assembly*. The reason of the thing is founded in nature,—not in *prejudice*, or custom, but in *nature*. It would be deemed monstrous for a woman’s voice to be heard, as a speaker in any promiscuous secular assembly. Nor is her appearance in such assemblies ever thought of in any scheme of female education. It is

in *religious* assemblies alone that this anomaly is ever seen: nor has the sanction which has been given to the practice by respected preachers and christian churches made the practice, as yet, respectable *there*, in the eyes of intelligent people. Notwithstanding the commonness of the thing, it is still felt to be an impropriety: and it will be, so long as nature shall control the sentiments of mankind.

2. Besides that the practice is prohibited by Paul, there are no *examples*,—or none which can be taken for precedents—throughout the history of the several religious dispensations. Of the “preachers of righteousness” before the flood, that we have any account of, none were women. Nor do we find that females ever officiated in the public services of religion, under the Patriarchal and Mosaic, or Levitical, dispensations. Nor did Christ send females forth to preach and teach as he did the seventy; or leave any commission or give any instructions for their doing so, in succeeding times. There has been but one law about this business from the beginning of time. All that is said of woman in the Bible, from the day she was formed until now,—all that is said of her character, her relations, her demeanor, is of a piece with the above citations from the apostle, and may stand as an impracticable commentary on them.

3. She is not *fitted* for speaking in public. She may have *mind* enough, but she wants the *physical* qualities—the *voice* and *nerve*, which are requisite. The voice

of woman, like the susceptibilities of her heart, is delightfully formed *for her sphere*,—for the tones of love in her family, for the enlivening converse of the parlor, for the tender offices of sympathy ; but it is no more formed for the public assembly than the lute is formed for the camp. She is not *fitted*, I say, for speaking in public, and it is not to be supposed, therefore, that her Creator expects her to do that for which he has not fitted her. He does not gather where he has not strowed.

4. It is not the design, or nature of religion, to impair by its requirements the proper character of its subjects. On the contrary, it seeks to heighten and adorn whatever belongs to our nature as God originally made us. It regards the proprieties of sex. It condemns effeminacy in man, and masculineness in woman. It does not require woman to cease to be woman because she becomes a Christian ; but on the contrary, inculcates an amiable modesty of feeling and demeanor beyond what she possessed before. But no female, and no *young* female especially,—in whom naturally there is the timid reserve of youth, as well as of sex—can engage as an exhorter, or leader in prayer, in the presence of men, (my mind revolts at the subject,) without her delicacy being blunted, in proportion to the frequency, and boldness, with which she engages in the unseemly and forbidden exercise. “There *is* generally, and *should be* always, in the female character, (says Dr. Beecher) a softness and delicacy of feeling which shrinks from the notoriety of a public performance. It is the guard

of female virtue, and invaluable in its soothing, civilizing influence on man ; and a greater evil, next to the loss of conscience and chastity, could not befall the female sex, or the community at large, than to disrobe the female mind of those ornaments of sensibility, and clothe it with the rough texture of masculine fibre. But no well educated female can put herself up, or be put up to the point of public prayer, without the loss of some portion at least of that female delicacy, which is above all price ; and whoever has had an opportunity to observe the effect of female exhortation and prayer in public will be compelled to remark the exchange of softness and delicacy for masculine courage, so desirable in man, so unlovely in woman ; and if we need farther testimony, the general character of actresses is a standing memorial of the influence of female elocution before public assemblies.”*

There is one passage, and only one, so far as I know, which is supposed to favor the practice of females speaking in the church ; which I will notice directly.

There are, however, a few instances which I believe are sometimes pleaded ; as Deborah, Anna, and the daughters of Philip. But these were *inspired* women, and are therefore not to be taken for precedents, unless our women also claim to be inspired. If God, who has a right to make exceptions to his general laws,

* Letter to Beman.

has at different times imparted the spirit of prophesying to holy women, for the same end that he endued the apostles and others with the power of healing and working miracles and speaking with tongues, namely, for confirming the truth of religion, this cannot be pleaded to set open a door for all the sex to speak.

The passage referred to above is 1 Cor. xi. 3—16. On this passage I observe,

(1.) That the best commentators, and *all* the commentators which I have been able to consult, understand the females here alluded to, to have spoken under a miraculous influence.* Of the correctness of this interpretation he who will may satisfy himself by an intelligent reading of the passage, and its context. The passage speaks of women that prayed and *prophesied*,—a word which never signifies speaking in an ordinary manner. And throughout the context,—read from the beginning of the eleventh to the end of the fourteenth chapter,—the apostle is speaking of miraculous gifts. These females then were *prophetesses*, and being such, are not a precedent for us,—unless, I say, our female speakers are prophetesses likewise. They belong to the class of Deborah and the others.

(2.) The apostle reprobates the practice as inconsistent with woman's modesty, even in prophetesses, except un-

* As most of my readers, probably, have Scott's Commentary at hand, I refer them to that. They may read, if they please, what he says on the several passages before us; 1 Cor. xi. 2—16; xiv. 34, 35; and 1 Tim. ii. 11—14.

der certain regulations, namely, with the head veiled. "Judge in yourselves ; is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered ?" And he demands if even nature does not teach them, that what is becoming in a man is not becoming in a woman.

(3.) To make the most we can of the passage, it is not so clear that it favors the practice in question, as it is that the other passages cited do positively forbid it ; and according to a well known law of interpretation, if two passages appear to be at variance with each other, that which is most plain is to determine us. The clear is to interpret the obscure or doubtful, and not the obscure the clear.

There is, however, no obscurity in the case ; nor any collision between the passages. The fact undoubtedly is, that some females *endued with the gift of prophesy*, spoke in the meetings of the Corinthians, where some also spoke with tongues, and some wrought miracles of healing ; but these were special cases belonging to those times. The *general law*, is laid down in the passages first quoted. In those passages a modest *silence* is enjoined on females in all mixed religious assemblies.

What then can be said in defence of the practice, when, as it appears, both revelation and nature are against it ?

Is it said that women are often *better qualified* to exhort or pray in a meeting than the men that are pre-

sent, and can speak more to edification? It may be true; but what then? This does not alter the scripture. So too are some unordained men better qualified to preach than some ministers are; but this does not justify their taking the pulpit. So too are some wives, and mothers better qualified to lead in family devotions, or family government, than their husbands are; but are they therefore warranted to do so? We are not at liberty to bring in our particular case of expediency to supersede God's standing laws. If God says, let your women keep silence in the churches, it is presumption and impiety to answer, that they are qualified to speak and therefore they shall!

Is it alleged that *good* comes of the practice?—that you can name the individuals that have been impressed and converted by hearing a female speak? The answer is still the same. If it be *not in the Bible*, if it be *prohibited* there, it cannot be justified. How much good or evil it does, is not the question; but whether it is agreeable to the scripture. People are impressed by a great many things and good comes out of evil. I was acquainted with a youth who was powerfully awakened by an instance of anger and profaneness; but I never thought of enlisting anger and profaneness into my system of means for converting men, on account of the good which they did in that particular instance.

But as for the good which is done, or supposed to be done, by means of this practice, it is the conviction of multitudes of sensible people that the mischief infinite-

ly surpasses the good. It may serve to give notoriety to a meeting, and to draw a multitude together, some in the simplicity of their hearts to approve and be edified, perhaps, but more to gape and look on, as they do at the Caledonian Chapel, where they speak with tongues; it may serve to make converts to a name, a sect, a party or a fashion in religion; and it *may* serve, possibly, to make some converts to Christ,—I will not affirm that it does not; but that it is, on the whole, calculated to glorify God and advance the cause of Christ; that it tends to elevate religion in the view of the world, and to increase the aggregate number of converted souls; and that it would be well to introduce it into all churches; is unhesitatingly disbelieved, nay, upon the basis of the bible is confidently denied.

But females need not feel that they are *debarred from usefulness* because “it is not permitted unto them to speak” in the church. There are many ways in which they may be, and are, to their credit, exceedingly useful. In many ways of efficient, but unobtrusive influence, they are winning souls to Christ. They that are acquainted with woman’s history, from the beginning till now, or with the signs and movements of the times, will hardly think her behind the other sex, in the service of Christ. And I doubt not, when they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever,—that then woman shall receive her enviable share of the glory.

Thy works, and alms, and all thy good endeavor,
Staid not behind, nor in the grave were trod ;
But, as faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss forever.

HASTY ADMISSIONS TO THE CHURCH.

There has been much futile reasoning and appealing to apostolic example, in favor of the practice of receiving persons into the church *immediately* on their conversion.

That this was done by the apostles is true. But they did it with reasons which do not exist at present. A willingness to profess Christ then, was, in itself, a greater evidence of genuine faith than such a profession is now. The times themselves "tried men's souls," and rendered probation unnecessary. For when believers were "made a gazing stock, both by reproaches and afflictions," and were beset with "manifold temptations ;" when to be cast out of the synagogue, and to be scattered abroad by persecutions, and to be killed, as a service rendered to God, was the price of Christian profession, it was not difficult, generally, for the disciples to know the spirit of those who proposed to join them. The thing most to be apprehended was, not that the unsanctified would come forward, but that true converts would keep back.* And there were reasons which more

* "In the primitive times, they made such a profession [of their faith and religious experience] *at their being added* [i. e.

nearly concerned the candidates themselves. They needed immediately the sympathy and fellowship of the church, to sustain them against the pressure of the times.

But the practice was early discontinued. It was discontinued, there is reason to believe, by the apostles themselves, but certainly in the first century, as the reader of church history knows. When 'the churches had rest,' and were multiplied, and it was less embarrassing, if not more popular, to join them, there was some delay usually before candidates were received; both that the church might be better assured of their piety, and that they might receive, if necessary, the requisite instruction in the truths of the gospel.*

It is doubtless an error to put off profession too long; but that there should be *some* interval between conversion and uniting with the church, the following reasons may satisfy us.

1. There should be some time for the convert to *examine himself*. For not all who suppose themselves

by the act itself of joining themselves] *unto the church*; and the profession had this justifying circumstance in it, when they endangered their very lives to make it. I make no doubt but in such a time of persecution the like profession ought to be esteemed sufficient. But in places where the true religion is in *repute* and *fashion*, then to look for some other justifying circumstance of a profession is but a reasonable conformity to the custom and manner of the apostles."—*Cotton Mather*.

* See Murdock's *Mosheim*, Vol. 1 p. 97, § 5.

converts, and that with rejoicing and confidence, really are so. There are some who 'anon receive the word with joy,' but 'have no deepness of earth; and when the sun is up they are scorched; and because they have no root they wither away.' "But let a man examine himself, (says the apostle,) and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

2. There ought to be some opportunity for the *church* to be satisfied. The candidate comes to them, as a new subject, to be received to their communion and fellowship. But this fellowship, to be real, must be justified by evidence. It must be founded on a satisfactory knowledge of the person's previous and present habits, feelings, motives, and views of truth. But all this cannot be taken at sight, and upon the individual's simple profession, however apparently sincere; when, for aught we know, he may be as ignorant of himself as we are of him, and when we have too much cause to remember that in hundreds of cases the goodness of such as have made similar hopeful professions has proved but as a morning cloud, and as the early dew.

"Our charity towards all men, of whom we know nothing amiss, is to "hope all things" and believe the best: but when we come to make a judgment of them that lay claim to privileges with us, 'tis but reason that our charity should require a more positive evidence of the qualification on which the claim is made."

It is therefore due to the members that they should have *some* time for a more private and familiar acquaintance with the candidate, than they can have from

his confession, or from an immediate public examination, at the instant of his supposed conversion.

3. A just concern for the *purity of the church*. If we are required to *purge out* the old leaven that we may be a new lump, it is certainly proper that we should exercise due care to *keep* it out. Who does not know that often there are many more who are disposed to press into the *church* than are actually pressing into the *kingdom of heaven*. Especially is this the fact in times of great and general awakening. Who does not know enough of revivals, and of mankind, to know, that it is a difficult thing to detach so large a mass from the world and add it to the church, as is often done, without drawing some portion of the world along with it? How many secret ties there are, binding the renewed and unrenewed together,—ties of kindred, of companionship, of *love*, which inspire the resolve that the one shall not be taken and the other left! Alas for our churches when this shall be our practice—when all that self-delusion encourages, or sympathy moves, or interest draws, or remorse and fears impel, shall be admitted without delay!

What is the object of examining candidates at all? It is to keep our churches pure. If once this practice be given up (says Owen,) “a world of unqualified persons will soon fill, and pester and corrupt the house of God, and cause him to go far off from his sanctuary. We may then justly fear that these golden candlesticks will be no longer so, but become dross and tin, and

reprobate silver, until the Lord has rejected them." But we may almost as well dispense with the practice of examining at all as to admit persons immediately upon their professed conversion.

I do not know that any *definite rule* can be laid down as to the length of time which should elapse before admission, or that this is desirable. It depends much on circumstances—the previous habits of the candidate,—his natural temperament,—his knowledge—his years, perhaps, and the clearness of his present views and feelings.

GENERAL OBSERVANCE OF ORDER.

This chapter on measures may be properly concluded with some remarks on the importance of a general observance of established order.

An interest so extended as the church of Christ, and in which so great a variety of persons are concerned, must have some general rules of propriety according to which its affairs are to be conducted. All societies have such rules. They are not always exactly defined and written, but they are such that it is not difficult for modesty and good sense to keep within them.

These rules must not be disregarded. Every essential departure from them is of mischievous tendency. It may be *convenient* to do certain things, in certain cases, when it would not be best on the whole. It might be convenient sometimes for an unlicensed student to

preach, or for an unordained licentiate to administer ordinances; it might appear to be well, in the view of some, for the ardent brethren of one church to push their labors into another; or for a "revival preacher" to throw himself with violence into the parish of a minister whom he thought deficient in zeal; it might be pleasant to some, and very lively and edifying, according to their notions of edification, that every one, when we come together, should have a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation. But think of the consequences of these things. What confusion and disorder are introduced among us! What disgusts and alienations! What discredit to religion!

If one, following his own particular humor, may break down the fence on one side, another will do the same on another side, till we have no acknowledged order, and are become "like a city broken down and without walls." There may be, possibly, *too much* regard to order, too punctilious an observance of forms; but too much is better than none.

The founders of the Congregational order were eminently lovers of liberty; and they introduced into their system as much freedom as they could without licentiousness. They set up no superfluous landmarks. They run no unnecessary lines. But they respected *decency* not less than liberty, and feared licentiousness not less than despotism. "There is a liberty, (said one of their excellent magistrates) which is affected both by *men*

and *beasts* to do *what they list*; and this liberty is inconsistent with authority, impatient of all restraint. By this liberty *sumus omnes deteriores*; [we are all debased] 'tis the grand enemy of truth and peace, and all the ordinances of God are bent against it."* They established their regulations with great prayerfulness and consideration, and with equal knowledge of the Bible and of men. Under these regulations our churches have, for above two centuries, enjoyed unparalleled prosperity. And it were impiety, it were treason now, to break down a system which has been blessed of God, and respected of men, so eminently and so long.

* Winthrop.

CHAPTER X.

RELATIONS OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY—PARISH AFFAIRS.

THERE is but one case in which the church and the society act in separate capacities ; namely, in the settlement of a Pastor. And in this they must act harmoniously, or not at all ; their concurrence being necessary to an election. In all other cases, where their common interests are concerned, they act as one body.

In settling a minister the order of proceeding is this.

The candidate usually preaches for a short term upon trial, especially if he be young in the ministry, at the invitation of a joint committee of the church and society.

The question of giving a call is first tried in the church. If agreed to here, the vote is communicated to the society, inviting its concurrence. In both bodies the majority decides.

The call, being concurred in by the society, is officially transmitted to the Pastor elect, by the committee ; who are expected to communicate to him the state of the vote, the proposed terms of salary, with such other facts, or circumstances, as it may be important to him to know.

If the call be accepted, the usual council is convened

to attend to the ordination ; before whom the committee lay the respective votes and doings of the church and society, with the answer received, and other documents, if there are any, which the council may need.

So various are the tastes and characters of men, that *perfect unanimity* is not often to be expected in an affair of this kind. But it is important to have as near an approximation to unanimity as may be. If the minority be large, the candidate will not generally think it best to accept. Or if he does, the prospect of his usefulness is doubtful.

For the grounds on which the church has a separate action from the society, and takes precedence of it, in calling a minister, (the propriety of which is indisputable, and which ought not to be departed from,) the reader may consult Mather's *Ratio Disciplinae*, and Upham's work* with the same title. The principal and obvious reason is, the securing a faithful ministry. It often happens that the majority of voters in society are not religious persons. It often happens that numbers of them are worldly, vain, or perhaps, immoral, and that some are favorable to unwholesome doctrines, or to a lax and compromising discharge of ministerial duty ; and as such persons are too apt to consult their worldly tastes and interests, there would be danger of an unhappy election. It is true that the present arrangement cannot always prevent such a choice, but it

* A book which every Minister should own.

affords as much security as the case admits of. Two majorities are not so easily secured as one. And however the society may vote, the distinct voice of the church, unless the salt have lost its savor, will be for purity and faithfulness. The usage in question is scriptural, Congregational, and safe.

SUPPORT OF THE MINISTER.

The duty of providing for the maintenance of those who preach the gospel is so obvious, that to reasonable people there needs no argument on the subject. As, however, there are many who have never distinctly considered it, and have but feeble convictions with regard to it, while others deny and decry the duty, it may not unprofitably occupy some pages in this volume.

It is, in the first place, a matter of *necessity* that the people support the minister.

The work of the ministry is such as to forbid his supporting himself; and how is he to live?

The Bible enjoins it on him to give himself entirely to his work. The work of the ministry is to be his one and all-absorbing employment, to the exclusion of every secular avocation. 1 Tim. iv: 13—16. 2 Tim. iv: 1, 2.

The work *requires* such exclusive devotion. It is enough, and more than enough, for all his time, all his strength, and all his mind. There are those who ima-

gine that the minister's office is for six days in the week a sinecure, and that the seventh requires but a little talking, which costs nothing. Such persons know as much of the subject as the clown knows "what is done in the cabinet." Of the mental labors of the minister, more wasting than those of any other profession; of the multitude of demands made upon his time and mind, not only in the pulpit and the lecture room, but by the sick bed, the house of mourning, and the grave; of his responsibilities, anxieties, watchings, prayers; of his duties abroad, as well as at home, at anniversaries, ordinations, councils, &c. they have no notion.

That *some* ministers make an easy matter of their office, I do not question; but there is no *faithful* minister who does not envy the farmer at his plough, or the mechanic in his workshop. Go into any faithful minister's parish, and there is seldom a man in it, even the most worldly, that has so few free hours as he. The minister, says one, "is the only person to whom the whole economy of christianity gives no cessation, nor allows him so much as the Sabbath for a day of rest." The care of *every* religious interest of the church and parish, and, (in this age of benevolent enterprize,) I had almost said, of the world, devolves itself upon him.

It is therefore obvious that he has no time or mind to devote to a secular calling to obtain a subsistence.

He must either live of the gospel, or else leave it, or starve.

If he attempt to support himself, his sacred profession must suffer. There is distraction between the two objects; and either in this or in that, and indeed in both, the man must be unfruitful. The experiment has been abundantly tried; and the result is known in too many melancholy instances of a ministry careworn and barren, if not secularized and half apostate.

This is not all. While the profession of the minister precludes a support from secular earnings, it at the same time subjects him to many *expenses* which are not incident to other callings.

I will not speak of the large expense of his education,—for which many leave the college and the seminary in debt. There are other expenses to which he is always subject; as those of hospitality, travel, books, postages, and the like.

Nor can he *conform to his circumstances*, however poor, as others can. If he were a private man, his apparel might be cheaper. But a people do not wish to see their minister in a very coarse or threadbare dress, especially on public occasions. If he were in a private station, he might occupy a smaller house, or one less central, and of smaller rent. But you would not wish your minister to entertain the strangers that visit your place, in a tenement so narrow as to be destitute of lodgings, or so incommodious as to oblige him to say to all, you must go elsewhere: there is no room for

you here. By compelling him to disown the duties of hospitality, you would bring either a suspicion of penuriousness on *him*; which is an unfortunate character for a minister; for one of the duties, as well as virtues, of the minister is, that he be “a lover of hospitality:” or else the charge upon *yourselves*, of starving your minister; which is an unfortunate character for a people.

It is therefore a matter of *necessity*, that he receive his support from the people.

But take another view of the subject. It is *just* and *reasonable* that he should. For he labors for the people’s benefit. He leaves other professions, and his own interest, to be useful in this. Others labor for *themselves*. The husbandman toils at the plough with the expectation of enriching his own granary. The merchant traffics for gain to be appropriated to himself and family. The mechanic sells his wares at a price. The physician sends his bill; the lawyer his amount of fees. The laborer expects his wages. But the minister labors with no such immediate view to his own emolument. *He* alone, of men, goes and comes, studies, thinks, and labors, for the good of others, and keeps no reckoning. He foregoes emolument, spends his time, wastes his health, is a stranger to ease, for their sake. Upon what principle is it, of justice, or of honor, that he should do this and not be so much as furnished with needful food and raiment? Have they a

natural *claim* to his services? Have they a right to *command* them? Not at all. He is naturally as "free from all men" as others are; and has made himself "a servant to all," only at their invitation, and by his own consent.

It is therefore *just* that he should receive his support, leaving the *necessity* of it out of view.

But, thirdly, The *Bible* inculcates the duty. It has no reserve or delicacy on the subject. He that calls ministers to their work has taken care that they be supported. He has manifested even a *solicitude* on the subject which is very observable. Under the Jewish dispensation he charged the Levites with the service of the sanctuary, and gave for their subsistence the tithes and offerings of their brethren; and he repeatedly charges the latter never to forget this duty, lest the former, deprived of their only dependance, should fail for want of bread. "Take heed to thyself that thou forget not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth." And again, giving the reason, "The Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part or inheritance with thee."*

When our Lord sent forth the twelve to preach, he said, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses: nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is

* Deut. xii. 19, xiv. 27. See Numbers xviii. 20, 21. Duet. xviii. 1—8.

worthy of his meat. Again, when he sent forth the seventy, he gave them a similar direction, adding, as before, that “the laborer is worthy of his hire.”

Paul is full on the subject. “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things.”—“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn: And, The laborer is worthy of his reward.”—“Who goeth a warfare any time, at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”*

* Matt. x. 7—11. Luke x. 1—9. Gal. vi. 6. 1 Tim. v. 17, 18. 1 Cor. ix. 7—14.

The duty being established, the following are obvious inferences.

1. A minister's salary is not a *gratuity*, but a just *obligation* on the people's part. It is that which could not be withheld without *injustice*, not to say *impiety*. Of course, each individual, contributing his part, should not say within himself "I *give* this," but, "I do it in discharge of an obligation."

2. If a minister be entitled to a support at all, he is entitled to a *full* support. He is entitled to *live* of the gospel, i. e. to a living, or support. I will not discuss the *quantum*. If an expensive education, if talents, industry, laboriousness, if moral worth and exclusive devotedness to the public good, were to be made the basis of the calculation, he would be entitled to as good an estate as the same qualities might secure to him in another profession. But the minister's reward is not of this world. It is not in houses and lands, but in crowns of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus. It is not desirable, probably, that he should be rich; but he ought not to be absolutely poor. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," may the minister say, as well as others. A comfortable support is *necessary*; something more than this is *reasonable*. He should be provided for, not only as long as he is able to preach, but as long as he lives; and his children also, till they are of an age to be above dependence.

That he should be free from present embarrassment,

and above all reasonable anxiety in regard to the future is essential to his efficiency and usefulness.

But it is too often the policy of a parish to ascertain by calculation upon how small a sum its minister can barely live. And too many ministers are barely subsisting for the present ; are straitened even, from day to day, with their utmost economy ; and are trusting in God for the future—How they are to live when health fails them, how their children are to be educated, or their families supported, in case of their death, is known only to God. But to the man of God *that* trust is sufficient. God will take care of his own.

3. It is the practice of some to withdraw or keep themselves from any legal connexion with ecclesiastical societies, because such connexion subjects them to a share in the support of the minister, and other current expenses. If the money be raised by tax, they are not holden ; if by rent of pews, they do not bid ; if by subscription, they sign nothing, or if they do, their pride compounds with their selfishness, in a small sum that passes for a subscription. I say their *pride*, for their *conscience*, I fear, has nothing to do with the business.

But let such reconcile their course as they can with honor, justice, and the bible. It is probable indeed, that many adopt this policy without much reflection. But they ought to consider that there is both impiety in it towards God, and a threefold injustice as it regards

man. It is unjust to their minister,—but that is the least consideration; it is unjust to their neighbors, who, in addition to their own share of the common burthen, are forced to assume that which these delinquents refuse; and unjust to themselves and families, who, of all concerned, are in reality the greatest sufferers.

4. We see how much reason there is for the cry of “*hireling*” against salaried ministers. This insidious cry is often raised by the infidel and ungodly; but not exclusively by them. It has been too often raised by mistaken (but I hope well meaning) christians. But all the prejudice they can raise is laid at once by common sense and the bible. Call it ‘*hire*,’ if you will: what does the bible call it? It says the laborer (meaning the minister,) is *worthy* of his *hire*. Let no christian hold this illiberal language till he is wiser than his bible, and would have his minister to be more disinterested than Paul.

All denominations of christians have found it necessary, notwithstanding some experiments to the contrary, in some mode or other, to provide for the support of their ministers. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians and others, do it by fixed salaries. The Methodists support their preachers liberally, but in a manner peculiar to themselves.* I am acquainted with churches of but

* The allowance to a travelling preacher is, for himself \$100

one denomination in New England, that have dispensed with, and condemned a *stipulated* support. The consequence has been as might be expected. Their ministers have been obliged to resort to various mechanic or other employments. I knew one a post rider; another a cordwainer; another a rope maker. And their preaching corresponded. It had more of the dust of the workshop than of the beaten oil of the sanctuary. Good men, I doubt not, they were; but lean in their knowledge of the Scriptures and of much besides that

and his travelling expenses; for his wife \$100; for each of his children under the age of seven \$16, over that age and under fourteen, \$24, annually. Preachers whose wives are dead are allowed for each child a sum sufficient to pay the board of such child, or children, while under the specified age.

A house is also to be provided for the family of the preacher, and furnished "with at least heavy furniture," rent free; also *fuel* and *table* expenses.

A house, fuel, and table expenses are to be furnished likewise for the presiding elder of the district.

The support of the preacher does not cease with his active service. "The allowance of superannuated, worn out, and *supernumerary* preachers shall be one hundred dollars annually.

"The annual allowance of the wives of superannuated, worn out, and *supernumerary* preachers, shall be one hundred dollars.

"The annual allowance of the widows of travelling, superannuated, worn out, and *supernumerary* preachers, shall be one hundred dollars.

"The orphans of travelling, *supernumerary*, superannuated,

a minister should know; and fanciful and incorrect in their biblical, or rather unbiblical, expositions. And leanness and bigotry characterize the churches which have been edified by their ministry.

5. The *consequences* of the non-fulfilment of this duty.

Whatever these may be as they affect the minister, personally, they are more disastrous as they affect the people. The minister is a man of like infirmities as

and worn out preachers, shall be allowed by the annual conferences, the same sums respectively, which are allowed to the children of living preachers."—*Book of Discipline*.

I quote these things because it is the idea of some that Methodist preachers live on air; but more especially because some of these provisions, which respect superannuated and worn out preachers, and their dependent offspring, are very commendable, and worthy of the consideration of other denominations.

As to *supernumerary* preachers, I presume there are not many among the Methodists. If there are, the propriety of supporting them I should think questionable. The *laborer* is worthy of his hire; but the bible says nothing about "supernumeraries"—men for whom no employment can be found in the vineyard of the Lord.

The money for defraying these expenses comes, of course, as it ought, from the people—either directly or indirectly. In no denomination are collections more frequently called for, with a view to the support of its preachers, and to other current expenses. There is no alchemy in Methodism any more than in other sorts of religion.

others. He is as naturally cheered or depressed, stimulated or disheartened by circumstances, as other men. Nor can he be all that a minister is expected to be, and yet be something else, at the same time. And it should be remembered that whatever loss of vivacity, or efficiency, or time, his ministry suffers, in consequence of the people's neglect to provide for him, the loss is eminently *theirs*. The work of the ministry, his proper work, is *to them* the most important work in which he can be occupied. They must allow him to "meditate upon *these* things,"—not upon his debts and distresses and means of living; and to "give himself *wholly* to them," and not in part to some worldly avocation; if they would have his 'profiting appear to all.' If the deficiency of a too slender support is to be made up by somebody, it had better be done by them than by him. If I hire a laborer to do an important work for me, which shall require his exclusive attention,—to tend my field, for example,—it were better to give him his meals than to compel him to earn them elsewhere, at the expense of half his time. Weeds and a starveling crop will tell me so, in the end.

A people who are not willing, or not careful, duly to provide for their minister, are not in a *state of mind* to be much profited by his labors. There is evidence that they do not esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake.

They are not likely to *pray for him*, at least not sincerely. "It is curious to hear (says Mr. James) how some per-

sons will entreat of God to bless their minister in his basket and his store, while alas ! poor man, they have taken care that his basket should be empty, and his store nothingness itself. Is not this mocking both God and his minister with a solemn sound upon a thoughtless tongue ?”

They have no right to expect *the blessing of God*. If it be covetousness, or indifference, which causes their neglect, these are not the feelings which God approves. We have seen that such neglect is contrary to his requirements. He considers it a wrong done to himself. God has remarkably shown himself interested in the just claims of the laborer ; and expresses his indignation at those who withhold their wages. Jas. v. 4. Does God concern himself thus for the wages of the laborer of the field, and is he indifferent to the sustenance of his ministers ? Nay, doth God take care for *oxen* ? for the faithful laboring animal ; and not for his faithful servants who labor for him ?

He has called his ministers to their work with a scripture provision before their eyes, of support. If this is withheld, he will take care of his servants, but it will not be for the good of the delinquents. He calls it robbery,—a robbing of *him* ; and declares it to be a reason of his withholding his blessing.*

Finally ; it is no less the *interest* than it is the *duty*

* Mal. iii. 8—10—Compare with Numb. xviii. 20, 21, 31.

of the people to support their minister. It is their privilege to do whatever is necessary to make his ministry among them, unembarrassed, cheerful, and efficient. They can well *afford* to do this, even in a *pecuniary* view. There is no devoted minister who does not benefit even the pecuniary interests of his people greatly beyond the amount of his stipend. All that his influence does to save them from sin, saves them from that which is more expensive than godliness. Look at the parish which is blest with a faithful minister, and at another which is blest with none : compare the sobriety and thrift of the former, with the vices which prevail in the other, its inebriates and idlers, its frolics and extravagances, its litigations, and many other tax-levying iniquities, more exorbitant than the publicans of old ; and this shall settle the point, that the christian ministry is worth more, incomparably more, I say, in a *pecuniary* view, than it costs.

But what is it worth in a *religious* view ! If it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and if thus you and your children be saved ; if while you spare something of your temporal substance for the support of your minister, he is instructing you in that wisdom whose fruit is better than gold, and leading you up to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, how immeasurably are you the gainer ! How much is received beyond what is given ? And how blind, how miserable the policy, which prefers the incomputable costs

and losses of sin, pecuniary and moral, temporal and eternal, to the trifling burthen of a minister's subsistence averaged upon the community!

DIFFERENT MODES OF PROVIDING FOR PARISH EXPENSES.

1. The original mode of raising the Pastor's support, in New England was by *tax*. Meeting-houses were built, and other parish expenses provided for, in the same way.

This mode is strictly equitable. Taxation is graduated according to individual ability. It is right that each member of the community, enjoying a common benefit, should bear his part of the common burthen according to his means. This principle is so obvious, that it is universally acted on in civil affairs. Any other mode of raising subsidies would occasion a murmur from one extreme of the land to the other.

This was the mode originally established by God himself for the support of religion. Under the Mosaic dispensation, and earlier than that, each man paid his *tithes*, or tenths; which was strictly a tax. It was a levy graduated to each person's ability, or means, as our parish *rates* are. The same principle, or what is equivalent to it, is recognized in the New Testament; (1 Cor. xvi. 2) where each person is required to lay by for the purposes of the gospel *as God hath prospered him*; i. e. according to his ability.

For a century and a half there was no objection to

this mode in New England, the people being all of one denomination, and sensible enough of the importance of religion to be willing to support it. But as the state of society has changed, taxation for the support of the gospel has met with many obstacles from unreasonable and disaffected men, and has been laid aside, to a greater or less extent, for other modes.

2. A common mode has been an annual *sale, or rent, of pews*. This method has one advantage, as it has done away, where it is adopted, the old custom of *seating the meeting-house*; a custom which still exists in many places. This was a delicate business, and too often occasioned unpleasant feelings. It never could have been practised so long and so amicably by a people less characterized by deference for public order than the descendants of the Pilgrims. This method has also other advantages. By appealing to the selfish principle, it secures generally a prompt and cheerful accomplishment of the object. The money is raised, and every body is, or ought to be, satisfied. It calls the people together, and annually revives their interest in the society's concerns. And it heightens the value of a seat in the house of God, in each man's feelings, as he has voluntarily paid a sum for it. What is *bought* is *valued*; and especially what is bought in competition with others.

But this method is not without its faults. It makes no appeal to *duty*; or at least makes but a secondary

and feeble appeal to it. Its direct appeal is to selfishness. In that respect its tendency would seem to be bad. The more people are accustomed to be actuated by *principle* and *public spirit*, the better. Appeals to selfishness are soon exhausted; appeals to duty never. Again, this method does not distribute burthens equally. A public spirited individual bids off a high-rated seat, or more than one perhaps, for the sake of securing the object, while seven selfish spirits will make a joint-stock business of one, and that a cheap one. And (which sometimes happens, but I hope not often,) some unreasonable selfish man, out-bid by his neighbor upon a particular favorite seat, refuses to have any, and goes elsewhere, or stays at home for the year. But there is no mode which is unattended with difficulties. Perhaps this has as few as any. This mode is not, however, practicable where the seats are owned as private property, as in many instances they are, this being now the prevailing plan of building.

3. A third mode is *subscription*. This mode is probably destined to be universal. It was practised by the primitive christians. It is a mode of which there can be no complainers; unless it should be the most liberal, who, though they have the best right to complain, are the least disposed to do so. The evils of this mode appear to be these. It is more precarious than other modes. It encourages the idea of the support of the gospel being a *gratuity* on the part of

those who contribute,—removing the idea of obligation. It draws upon the generosity of individuals, rather than upon their ability, which is the equitable principle; and thus bears unequally on the liberal and the selfish. The obstacles it meets with are those which selfishness always interposes to the raising of money without the aid of legal constraint; obstacles which are the greater in the present case, as the call is repeated from year to year, and as many of those who are expected to subscribe, not only love their money too well, but are indifferently affected towards the cause itself for which the subscription is wanted.

The idea of a subscription is, of course, that each gives what he pleases. But it should be remembered that the *mode* of doing the thing does not alter the *duty*. Every one is bound in duty, and, in *honor*, to do as much by subscription as he would be required to do by tax. What! are we such recreants to principle, and honor too, that it shall require the constraint of *law* to induce us to do our part? This may be '*pagan*,' and it may be '*man*,' but it is not '*christian*,' nor *republican*.

The result of a subscription commonly is, that some do *more*, and others *less*, than their just proportion. The former, though not actuated by the motive of the unjust steward, experience the benefit he aimed at. They secure the good will of their fellow men. They raise themselves and their families in the estimation of the community; and make to themselves friends of the

mammon of unrighteousness, on earth at least; and in heaven too, if they are influenced by love to Christ. With what measure they mete it shall be measured to them again. The *latter* have not the consciousness of self respect, and do not escape the pity and censure of others; though the pity may be silent and the censure unexpressed.

4. *Funds.* It has been the policy of many societies to secure the support of the gospel by means of a fund. Funds may be well in certain cases, and to a certain extent: I will not say they are *never* well. But as a general thing, they are of doubtful expediency. To societies able to do without them they are a positive evil: especially where the fund is sufficient, or nearly sufficient for all expenses.

It is a general objection to them that they are at variance with an important principle of human nature. There is a disposition in human nature to value that which is obtained at some expense, or sacrifice. That which costs nothing is nothing valued. God has implanted this feeling in our minds, and himself acts with reference to it. He has so ordered our circumstances, that all which we enjoy, and heaven itself, is attained with effort and self-denial. The bounties of his providence are obtained by labor; and are enjoyed the more because of the labor. The sleep of a laboring man is sweet. He has regarded the same principle in religion. He made the religion of the Jews an *expensive* religion.

It had its tithes and offerings, and sabbaths, and feast days, involving sacrifices of substance and of time: and as long as the people were willing to make these sacrifices for it, it retained its hold on their minds; but when they sought to get rid of them, and began to rob God in tithes and offerings, declension ensued, and religion gradually perished. The same principle is regarded in the Christian system; its author having ordained that it should be supported by those who enjoy its privileges.

But funds overlook this principle. By making religion cheap, they make it to be cheaply prized. A fund is all the while teaching the lesson, and making the impression, that sacrifices are not to be made for the gospel, at least not habitually; and out of this ere long grows the impression that it is not *worth* such sacrifices: and if it be not worth the *pecuniary* sacrifices, it will not long be worth the *time* and *attention* which it requires.

I do not doubt that parish funds have been often raised and given from very pious motives, and that the pious dead are now reaping the rewards of such acts of beneficence and proofs of love to the cause of Christ. But in too many instances I fear the motives are rather those of selfishness and impatience of religious burthens than those of enlightened piety. The support of religion is a tax which the people are willing to get rid of. It is to be permanently provided for, if possible, by means of some pious bequest, a spirited subscription

entered into once for all, a lottery, or some other expedient. A feeling is betrayed like that of an old colored domestic, who being impatient of family prayers, used to say "Come, let us go in to prayers, and have it over and done with."

A people released by a fund from giving for the support of religion, soon become confirmed in the *habit* of not giving, and such a habit is poverty itself. As an example of this, I am acquainted with a society which was formerly able to erect an expensive meeting-house, and to support its minister with a handsome salary, and which is as populous now and as abundant in means as it then was, and probably more so; but having been blest with a fund for some fifteen or twenty years, it is become so poor as to have voted, that "the fund money," which is less than the minister's salary, is all they can raise. Alas! what would become of them if their fund should fail?—Of course, a missionary agent, "begging for money," can hardly be welcomed there; for how can they do for others who cannot do for themselves?

A fund, when adequate to all the wants of the society, *dispenses with the action of the people*. Where there is no fund, the question is, whether to have the gospel or not. It comes up to every mind. It is a topic of conversation. It calls the society together for joint counsel and co-operation. This is of great benefit. It keeps alive the interest. Its effect is specially good on the young men, who as they successively come

forward to manhood, are called on to act in the counsels and sustain the interests of the endeared community to which they belong.

A fund naturally *abates the mutual interest of minister and people*. This may be said without impeachment of the feelings or motives of either party. Such is our nature. When a minister sees his people making efforts from year to year to sustain him, it is a different thing to his feelings from receiving the cold avails of a fund. It is a different thing to the people. They love him more and profit more by his labors, while they are actively concerned for his welfare, and can feel that they thus entitle themselves to his affectionate regard.

And this is among the reasons for a people supporting their minister; and should stand for an argument on that head. It is *desirable* that they should, duty out of the question. It is sometimes advanced that the *church* alone ought to support the gospel, without calling upon the unconverted. It ought, if it must. But so long as the unconverted are *willing* to contribute to the object, they ought to be called on, as one of the best means of interesting them in it. That it is their *duty* to contribute cannot be questioned; and if it be their *privilege* also, as it certainly is, it is not expedient, if it be morally right, to withhold it from them. There is a moral influence connected with giving for religious objects, which appears to me to entitle it to an essential place among the means of bringing men to Christ.

A fund is liable to be *lost*. Then discouragement ensues. The society, like a rich heir made poor, comes to the ground without its accustomed means, and without the *habit* of supporting itself. It cannot dig: to beg it is ashamed.

However, such a catastrophe commonly proves to be more startling than ruinous. I do not doubt that the loss of their funds would be the best thing that could happen to many churches. Instead of indolently reposing upon their much goods laid up for many years, they would then place their reliance, as they ought, upon God and their own exertions; and would begin to know a prosperity, which they had not known for years. Instead of lying securely and supinely, like soldiers in a fort, they would set up their banners in God's name, and go forth to action. Action is essential to life. But there must be a *necessity* for action, or—such is man's sloth—he will not act. Hence the little spirituality, as a general thing, of *rich* churches. The lukewarm Laodiceans it would seem were rich as to their worldly resources; for “thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” says Jesus in his message to them; while the church in Smyrna, which he commends without rebuke, appears to have been poor; “I know thy works, and tribulation, and **POVERTY** (but thou art rich) &c.” So the churches of Macedonia of their “*deep poverty*” abounded in spiritual things. I do not say that poverty is a desira-

ble thing in itself; but it is less an enemy to grace, than great wealth laid up in funds.*

None are *supinely* good: with toil and pain,
And various arts, the steep ascent we gain.

It is among the evils of funds, that they *give an undue influence to unworthy and wicked persons*. They are a public bonus, thrown among the many, in the disposal of which the veriest heathen in the place has as loud a voice as the most worthy inhabitant. They give such persons a consequence in society which they never would purchase for themselves by their own liberality and public spirit. They sometimes give them an afflicting control over the society. Viewed as an instrument of power, they are a temptation to wicked men; who if they can find means to get a *legal* possession of them, are little concerned about moral right. I could mention an instance of a society—and it is but one among many which might be mentioned—where a party, enlarging itself with all the wicked that could be induced to join it, was able by its majority of

* When a certain bank failed, a few years since, in Connecticut, and carried down with it the treasured funds of a large number of ecclesiastical societies, may not the designed destruction of those funds have been among the providential reasons of the failure of the institution? Were not those funds the *Jonah* of the ship?—And how is it with those societies now? Are they not more vigorous, and more blest than they were before?

votes to control the fund and house, and appropriate them to a most unworthy deposed man (to say no worse of him,) for a series of years; a thing which never would have been done, had the support of their pseudo-minister depended upon the purses of those who employed him, and not upon the bequests of the pious dead.

Finally; funds are liable to be *perverted*. In how many instances are they now employed for the support of heresies, in this and other countries? How many Unitarian churches, American and English, are subsisting by this means—living upon the spoils of the piety of former orthodoxy? Guard them as you will, experience has shown it to be difficult to secure them from perversion.

I do not suppose that all the evils which I have mentioned, and others which might be mentioned, exist in every case. Perhaps in many instances none of them are experienced. The evils are, of course, modified by circumstances—by the manner in which funds are constituted, by their amount, and by the habits of the people. As a general thing however, the objections appear to be well founded.*

* A history of religious funds would be an instructive document. So would the history of other funds. Our Connecticut School Fund, for example. That it has had a favorable influence on primary education, in our State, on the whole, is very questionable.

As a means of supporting the gospel, funds, then, do not appear to be the mode which is either best adapted to the nature of man, or most consonant to the will of God. They are of doubtful efficacy to hold societies together, and to perpetuate religion. They operate through selfishness, which is itself an enemy to the cause. The more selfishness is fostered in the support of religion, the more certain it is that religion will eventually fail. It is not selfishness, or the bonds of selfishness, that can hold men together in a healthful religious capacity. It must be *principle* that does this. Principle, and a living, active interest, with looking to God, are infinitely better than funds.

And it seems to me preposterous, that one generation should think to discharge the duties of all posterity. God never designed this. Has he not made it as much the duty and *privilege* of one generation to support the gospel as of another,—as much our children's as ours? We cannot discharge them from the duty, we ought not to deprive them of the privilege. And, especially, if funds be attended with so many evils, as we have seen, we ought not to bequeath those evils to our children.

Let our children, or those who come after us, support the gospel for themselves. It is their privilege to do so, as it has been ours. We leave them our lands and means; our churches and our bibles: let us also leave them our example, and our prayers; and trust that the God of their fathers will be the children's God.

5. *Sabbath Collections.* It is the practice of some congregations, (though of very few in New England) to have collections every Sabbath for the support of the gospel. To this mode the following seem to be objections. 1. The amount of such collections is generally small. 2. They induce a *habit* of giving little, instead of liberal sums,—the plates being filled with cents and sixpences. An agent of one of our great benevolent institutions remarked, that he found this to be the fact, generally, where this method was in use. 3. They operate to keep some from the house of God. 4. They take up considerable time, and necessarily divert the minds of the congregation, in some degree, from the sacred exercises to which they have been attending.

It is true that Paul directed the churches of Galatia and Corinth to lay by something every Sabbath for the cause of Christ; but he does not direct them every Sabbath to take up a collection, but only to have it in readiness against the time when it should be called for. It was wanted too for other purposes than the support of the gospel among themselves. “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him *in store*, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

However, I would not discourage any practicable mode of supporting the gospel; and in some places this may be the best.

MEETING HOUSES.

It has already been remarked that the place where religious meetings are held should be made as agreeable as possible. Religion itself being not naturally agreeable, should be aided with whatever attractive accompaniments it innocently may; and, next to an acceptable preacher, nothing more invites people to its public assemblies, or elevates their feelings more, than a beautiful house. God himself has regarded this principle. He has shown it in the expressive and beautiful language of the Bible; in the splendor of the temple; in the attractive and even exhilarating arrangements of Jewish festivals; and in many ways.

Congregationalists have been behind no denomination in the number, commodiousness, and good taste of their church edifices. It may almost be said that the traveler in New England is never out of sight of one or more of their spires.

But the zeal of the sons has not always equalled the liberality of the fathers. There are occasionally seen houses which from their ancient and neglected appearance might be imagined to have belonged to a by-gone religion, as well as by-gone age. With their rocking steeples, and bowing roofs, and trembling floors, they stand at once a mouldering memorial of the piety that *was*, and a mournful emblem of that which *is*,—decayed and yet decaying.

It is in vain for a people to profess a lively regard

for religion while they show no concern for the beauty of its temple. Neither God nor man is likely to perceive it. God reproves such neglect. "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.—Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?—Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."*

Societies often imagine themselves too poor to build a new house. It is a great mistake. They are in reality too poor to endure with the old one; for nothing tends so much to indifference, and lean congregations, as a gloomy or comfortless house. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, [in this matter;] so shall thy poverty come as one that travelth, and thy want as an armed man." If you wish to encourage the growth of other denominations at the expense of your own, let your old house stand while they build new ones.

A society commonly finds itself surprisingly increased in ability and vigor in consequence of erecting a new house of worship. By awaking its long slumbering public spirit to the holy and delightful enterprise, by mustering its resources, and interesting many who before were indifferent, or not known to the society as members, it has found itself, at the conclusion of the

* Haggai, i 2—11.

enterprise, with increased numbers and diminished burthens. The effort that threatened to exhaust its resources, has greatly increased them. All feel a new impulse. The preacher is more animated, the congregation larger and more attentive. A new respect is felt for the sanctity of God's house and worship. The old house was so little delighted in, that many felt at liberty to dishonor it. The pews were covered with cuttings, the floors with defilement; and many made it a place of indecent lounging and repose.

The following things are so obvious that they scarcely need suggesting.

A house of worship should be built in a good architectural taste. It should be plain and strikingly chaste and neat. Excessive or fanciful ornament is not in keeping with the simplicity of christian worship. It should be "beautiful for situation." "On an hill," that it "cannot be hid," is better than in a hollow—where I have seen churches, even with beautiful eminences around them. It should be adorned, but not benighted, with trees. The house of the Lord was beautified with trees in the ancient time, as appears from the beautiful allusions which are made to them in the Psalms.

There should be some *free seats* in every house of worship, but it is not desirable that the seats should *all* be free,—except perhaps in Free churches, in cities.

It is not agreeable to most people to sit promiscuously. It is desirable to each family to have its own pew; and it is pleasant to see them together, in their place. Having their own pew, they can keep their bibles and psalm books there; they can cushion it, if they choose, and can keep it cleanly, being not annoyed by the uncleanly habits of others, especially tobacco-users; they can go to the house of God knowing where they are to find a seat, without care or embarrassment; and children can sit with their parents and be under their inspection. God himself, in all his institutions, has paid great regard to the family relation, and we ought not to do otherwise in our arrangements for public worship.

But while it is not desirable that the house should be open for an entirely promiscuous occupancy, there ought to prevail a most liberal spirit of accommodation towards all who may wish for room. It is unreasonable and wicked that any family should be excluded from the house of God so long as there is a single slip whose occupants could make room for more.

SECULAR USE OF CHURCHES.

It has been a practice with Congregationalists in New England to open their meeting-houses for other purposes than those which are religious, such as elections, political anniversaries, and other celebrations. The practice originated perhaps in the desire which

our fathers had, in common with other puritans and reformers, to discountenance that extreme superstitious regard which Catholics were wont to pay to consecrated places; and also in the fact that their civil affairs were closely blended with those of religion.

How far the practice may be justifiable in the view of others I cannot say; but to me it has seemed desirable that it should be discontinued.

There is a certain feeling of respect for sacred places and things which is not superstitious, but natural and proper; and which it is desirable to preserve and cherish,—but which the practice in question is calculated to destroy. The power of association must necessarily operate in this as in other cases. When we enter a theatre, or a senate-chamber, the very walls tell us of the things transacted there. When we enter a church our associations with the place should be naturally and only religious: but if within those walls we have witnessed the strifes of a warm political election, or have seen the pulpit occupied by a political orator, we can hardly exclude such things from our recollection.

I cannot help thinking that thus to familiarize people to all sorts of uses of the house of God has a tendency to make them less scrupulous about their behavior in it; and less scrupulous as to the persons who shall be allowed to enter it as preachers. To day God is worshipped in it, and Christ is preached; to-morrow it is the scene of political contention; and the day fol-

lowing it is, without much compunction, made to accommodate some minister of heresy. If these, and such like, are to be the allowed uses of the edifice, they had better be mentioned in the act of dedication, and the house be dedicated to God, the town, and other objects. There seems to be inconsistency, if not irreverence, to dedicate it to God, and call it his, and then make it as common to other uses as to his worship.

I would by no means encourage a superstitious reverence for wood and stone; nor would I object to as liberal a use of our churches as may be consistent with the professed design of their erection. I would not confine them to religious exercises simply, but would freely open them to other objects which are obviously related and subservient to religion. But beyond this their use is questionable. God has said "Ye shall reverence my sanctuary." Christ was offended at the secular concerns which he found within the precincts of the temple, and drove them out.

Civil communities, as such, have no right to *claim* the use of our churches. They are able, and should be willing, to provide buildings for their own purposes.

PARSONAGES.

As a society will always want a minister, and the minister will want a house, it were well if every soci-

ety would own a parsonage-house. It is often difficult for a minister to rent a house, and embarrassing to him to build. If he depends on renting one, he can occupy it only so long as may suit the convenience of the proprietor. He moves about a tenant at will. That he should be obliged to build, in these unsettled times, even if able, is hardly reasonable. For it is not improbable, dismissions being now so lamentably common, that by the time he has completed the building, having exhausted his narrow resources upon it, and more, perhaps, he is obliged to leave it to stand empty, or else to part with it at a sacrifice by means of a forced sale.

If a minister do build, especially if necessitated to do so, the property ought, in case of his dismissal, to be taken off his hands by the society at its fair value; and any reasonable embarrassment he may have experienced in consequence of building ought to be considered in the purchase.

It is obvious that a society can more easily furnish a house for its minister than he can for himself. Indeed the society can do it with little difficulty and considerable advantage. The use of the place will in part support the pastor; so that less will have to be raised in money. And by being the known family residence of the minister, it becomes, like the meeting-house itself, a common object of attachment, and a bond of union to the people.

THE YOUNG MEN.

Young men, as one of their first acts, on coming of age, should become members in form, of the ecclesiastical society. I will not urge this on the ground of their worldly advancement; though I might do this, for there is no more favorable introduction of a young man to the notice and esteem of the community; but I urge the nobler plea of citizenship and duty. Not coming forward to act as citizens, they might as well be minors still,—they *are* minors—as it regards society.

They often keep back from modesty, or not knowing the mode of becoming members. Pains should be taken to inform them.*

SCHOOLS.

Common schools and higher seminaries are an essential part of the polity and practice of Congregationalists. The Practical Church Member then will be interested in these. As an enlightened citizen, and still more as a christian, he will give his effectual support to

* In Connecticut a person becomes a member of an Ecclesiastical Society by lodging a certificate of his intention to belong to it, with the clerk, or if there be no clerk, with any other officer of the society. He thus becomes entitled to vote and act in all respects as a member, unless a majority of the society shall “dissent thereto,” at its next regular meeting.

In like manner any person ceases to be a member by lodging a certificate to that effect.

the cause of popular education and general intelligence.

A New Englander and a Congregationalist, of all men, should be the last to be negligent of schools; for it is to the intelligence of her people that New England and her Congregational churches have owed their prosperity. Popular ignorance would be the greatest enemy which Congregationalism would have to fear. It is too republican in its polity to thrive with ignorance. Besides this, it is the least informed among us that are most exposed to the arts of proselytism.

CHAPTER XI.

INTERCOURSE OF CHURCHES.

No churches have loved and respected each other more than the Congregational. Their common and venerated parentage; their intelligent piety; their unbroken vicinity; living as they do within sight of each other's spires, and within sound of each other's bells, throughout their beloved New England; their pious and respected authors; their many revivals; their common and noble enterprizes for the good of posterity and the world,—these have been the bonds of their endearment.

But the relations which subsist in the affections only, however delightful and profitable to dwell on, are topics which are not within the plan of this volume. I confine myself to matters of ordinary practical intercourse between the churches.

DISMISSION OF MEMBERS FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER.

Members proposing to transfer their relationship from one church to another, receive letters of dismission and recommendation to that effect.

When a member goes to reside in another place for a season only, expecting to return, and not choosing to

dissolve his existing connection, he receives a letter certifying his standing merely and commending him to the fellowship of the church where he proposes to be, for the time being.

The practice of giving such letters is primitive. See an example Romans xvi. 1, 2. "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." The propriety of the practice is obvious. It is grateful to a church to commend a beloved member, called in providence to leave them, to the christian regard of others; while at the same time such testimonials are necessary to prevent impositions.

The dismissal by letter is conditional. If the member be not received by the church to which he is dismissed, he remains connected as he was.

And here let us observe the importance of *good faith* in this business, on the part of the dismissing church. No church should dismiss and recommend a member to another, as in regular standing, who is in reality *not* so, or ought not to be so considered. Think of the character of such a transaction; and of its tendencies and consequences. How far removed is it from fraud? and if practised commonly, how soon would it annihilate the mutual confidence of the churches? But I

fear this is *sometimes* done,—through want, no doubt, of due consideration. A member finding himself in doubtful standing with his church, and probably obnoxious to its censure, thinks it best to take a dismission and go elsewhere; and the church, willing enough to part with him, inconsiderately thinks it best to grant his request. It is easier for them to pass a vote and write a letter, than to incur the trouble of a course of discipline. Let no such thing be done! If we *say* a member is in good standing let him *be* so in reality. Let him be *worthy* of the fellowship to which we recommend him; as we deem him worthy of our own. If we certify his good and regular standing, let us mean as the words import, and not merely that he is a member who has not been actually subjected to church censure. Why should one church unwittingly be burthened with the disorderly members of another?—whose offences they must discipline, or bear the opprobrium of their names.

The *church* also to which we dismiss a member must be a church in good standing. How can we commend a disciple of Christ to the fellowship of heretics! a believer in Christ to the communion of those who deny the Lord that bought them! Or how can we commend one striving to keep himself pure, to the watch and care of them that are corrupt! What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord

hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?

For the same reason, we cannot dismiss a member to the *world*. "The church cannot make a member no member, but by excommunication."*

Every church has an acknowledged right to *examine* those whom it receives by letter, in the same manner as it examines those who are received on profession. But this is not generally practiced. Nor is it generally desirable. It would imply a want of confidence in a sister church, whose written testimony (unless it is known or supposed to be corrupt) should be sufficient.

No member of a church should permanently change his residence from one parish, or part of the country, to another, without taking a regular letter of dismission. This is due to all concerned. As a professor of religion, he is bound always to maintain a responsible connexion with some particular church; and be subject to its watch and discipline.

This is too often neglected. It is a subject of growing complaint in our churches; and some of them, in order to remedy it, have adopted a rule, that no person coming from abroad, and neglecting to bring such letter, shall be admitted to their communion, after a certain time.

* Camb. Platform.

EXCHANGES.

The exchanges of ministers is one species of the intercourse of churches. On this I make but one remark, but that one I would not willingly omit.

When a neighboring minister occupies your pulpit, however humble his gifts, treat him with respect;—with that respect which is due not only to him, as a minister, but to a *sister church* whom you profess to love, whose minister he is. Call him not “dull,” or “uninteresting;” and if he really is so, do not show him the disrespect of going to sleep, or going elsewhere. This hurts *him*,—unless he has grace and conscious worth enough to raise him above it; and it hurts *his people*, who know and love him as their pastor. It hurts his usefulness,—which, humble as he is in your account, may transcend the usefulness of many a famous man; for the foolish things, and the weak things of the world, are often the chosen instruments of God. It is moreover a poor compliment to *your* selves, and a doubtful one to your minister; who, grateful as he may be for your regard for him, will be more pained than flattered, when unkindness to a brother is the medium through which your partiality is manifested.

COUNCILS.

Councils are the representative bodies of the church-

es. They are composed of ministers and laymen, and are convened, usually, from churches of the same neighborhood, or district, but sometimes from places more remote.

In Connecticut, where the churches, with some exceptions, are *consociated*, we have *standing* councils, called *consociations*. A consociation comprises the churches of a county, or, in the larger counties, the churches of half the county; those few churches being excepted which prefer not to be consociated. It is expected that churches belonging to the consociation will resort to it rather than to a select council, on all occasions when a council is needed.

Where churches are not consociated, *Occasional*, or *Select* councils are had; that is, councils which are created for each particular occasion, and which cease to exist when the occasion is passed.

I shall not canvass the arguments which are commonly advanced respecting the comparative advantages of these different modes of constituting councils. The consociation has at least these advantages: being a permanent body, it can have its established rules of proceeding, and its permanent records.

Councils are also *Mutual* and *Ex-parte*. Mutual councils suppose the existence of two parties who agree to refer the matter between them to a council; each choosing an equal number of the churches com-

posing it, with an additional church chosen jointly by the parties if it be thought expedient. The *consociation* is a mutual council, being constituted prior to the existence of parties, and of course without reference to them. An *Ex-parte* council is a council called by one of the parties, the other not concurring. This latter is little known in Connecticut.

The occasions on which councils are called are such as these: the gathering of churches; the ordination, dismission, or deposition, of ministers; troublesome cases of discipline, dissensions, or other difficulties in a church, which the church itself is unable, or indisposed, to settle; and in general, all those occasions which require the advice, or concurrent action, of more churches than one.

The *powers* of councils. They have properly no juridical, but only advisory powers. Nevertheless, the moral reasons for abiding by their advice are such that it is seldom rejected. Embodying, as they do, the wisdom of assembled churches, without the odium of *power*, which men are naturally jealous of, their decisions are endued with the better efficacy of truth, opinion, and persuasion.

Respecting the powers of our Connecticut *Consociations*, however, there is some difference of opinion; some claiming for them juridical authority. The Saybrook Platform, which is the original constitution of

these bodies, is susceptible of different constructions; though the most obvious is, perhaps, in favor of their being juridical. But however this may be, such powers are at least inconsistent with a fundamental principle of Congregationalism,—the self-government of the churches; and our general practice agrees with this view of the subject.

ASSOCIATIONS.

These are composed of ministers alone. They meet statedly for mutual counsel, sympathy, and prayer. They consult together respecting their personal difficulties and duties as pastors, and respecting the interests of their churches; and make it a part of their business to devise, recommend, and execute useful plans. They also have public religious services.

These bodies exercise no ecclesiastical authority, except to license candidates for the ministry.

The minor associations are composed of the ministers of a county, or smaller district. The General, or State Associations are composed of delegates from these.

TRANSFER OF MINISTERS FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER.

It is a question proper to be introduced here, Whether one church may lawfully call the pastor of another church? Doubtless it may, in certain cases. If it be

clear that he will be more useful in the new sphere, the removal is allowable. For it is every man's duty to make the most of his talents in Christ's service; and the churches should be willing that he should. The minister of Christ is Christ's property, and not the property of a particular society. If it be not so, then, without the society's pleasure, he may not leave them for *any* sphere, however useful,—not for the presidency of a university, an important secretaryship, or a foreign mission. If it be right to remove a pastor in these cases, on the ground of his greater usefulness, it is right in the case before us, the principle being the same.

But in the manner in which this thing is done, often, it is doubtless wrong. Before a pastor be called away from his flock, it should be well considered how much good he is doing where he is, how much evil will result to the people bereaved, how many ties will be sundered, how many purposes be broken off,—and then, if in view of all you can proceed,—if neither covetousness nor robbery enters into the transaction, but simply a just regard to the cause of Christ,—the matter is lawful and the duty clear.

CHAPTER XII.

RELATIONS AND INTERCOURSE WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS.

RELATIONS WITH PRESBYTERIANS.

BETWEEN us and the Presbyterians there has existed a very intimate connection from early times. Near the close of the seventeenth century a formal agreement was entered into by the two denominations in England, with the understanding apparently,—from the title and terms of the compact,*—that they were thenceforward to regard themselves as one denomination. The union was promptly consented to by the churches in New England; and indeed it almost originated with them, one of their ministers, Dr. Increase Mather of Boston, then in England, being “singularly instrumental in effecting that union.”

This happy union has been farther recognized and cemented by several acts of agreement mutually entered into, some forty years since, by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the several New England State Associations. By these acts the perfect

* “Heads of Agreement assented to by the United Ministers, formerly called Presbyterian and Congregational.”

equality and fellowship of the churches and ministers of the two denominations are mutually acknowledged; their ordinations, censures, and other ecclesiastical proceedings are reciprocally regarded as valid and obligatory; and the delegates of each, respectively, are entitled to the same privilege of acting and voting in the ecclesiastical assemblies of the other as their own members.*

* One part of the "plan of union" has respect to the constituting of churches in new settlements. The following are its provisions; which, as they are not generally accessible to our ministers and members, and may be important to many of them, emigrating to the West, are deemed of sufficient importance to form this note.

1st. It is strictly enjoined on all their missionaries to the new settlements, to endeavor, by all proper means, to promote mutual forbearance and accommodation, between those inhabitants of the new settlements who hold the Presbyterian and those who hold the Congregational form of church government.

2nd. If in the new settlements, any church of the Congregational order shall settle a minister of the Presbyterian order, that church may, if they choose, still conduct their discipline according to congregational principles, settling their difficulties among themselves, or by a council mutually agreed upon for that purpose: But if any difficulty shall exist between the minister and the church or any member of it, it shall be referred to the Presbytery to which the minister shall belong, provided both parties agree to it; if not, to a council consisting of an equal number of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, agreed upon by both parties.

They are thus essentially one denomination. Though they have different denominational titles, and some di-

3d. If a Presbyterian church shall settle a minister of Congregational principles, that church may still conduct their discipline according to Presbyterian principles; excepting that if a difficulty arise between him and his church, or any member of it, the cause shall be tried by the Association, to which the said minister shall belong, provided both parties agree to it; otherwise by a council, one half Congregationalists and the other half Presbyterians, mutually agreed on by the parties.

4th. If any congregation consist partly of those who hold the Congregational form of discipline, and partly of those who hold the Presbyterian form; we recommend to both parties, that this be no obstruction to their uniting in one church and settling a minister: and that in this case, the church choose a standing committee from the communicants of said church, whose business it shall be, to call to account every member of the church, who shall conduct himself inconsistently with the laws of christianity, and to give judgment on such conduct: and if the person condemned by their judgment, be a Presbyterian, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Presbytery; if a Congregationalist, he shall have liberty to appeal to the body of the male communicants of the church: in the former case the determination of the Presbytery shall be final, unless the church consent to a further appeal to the Synod, or to the General Assembly; and in the latter case, if the party condemned shall wish for a trial by a mutual council, the cause shall be referred to such council. And provided the said standing committee of any church, shall depute one of themselves to attend the Presbytery, he may have the same right to sit and act in the Presbytery, as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian church.

versity of order, they are yet one, not only by formal consent, but in faith, spirit, and aim. And notwithstanding a disposition to dissolve their union has been manifested latterly by a small and illiberal minority, or, perhaps we should say, by some disquieted individuals, of one of the parties, we trust in God that it shall never be effected. The two branches of the great family are too much alike in character, they have too many noble and holy enterprises upon their common hands, and have too long been blest in their union, to be soon or easily sundered and estranged from one another. May God preserve both them and his cause from such a calamity !*

DEPORTMENT TOWARDS CHURCHES NOT IN COMMUNION
WITH US.

The division of the followers of Christ into sects, as

* Since this volume was prepared for the press, the General Assembly has (at its late session at Pittsburg,) *in part* abrogated the above plan of union. But their doings herein are so repugnant to the known sentiments of the great body of Presbyterians in the United States, that we are persuaded,—and indeed we are directly assured by men of extensive influence in that communion,—that by another Assembly, more correctly exhibiting the sentiments of the churches, the union will be restored, and more than restored, to its original intimacy. Meantime the act of a waning minority, cannot disturb the substantial harmony that prevails throughout these sister churches.

they are at present, is a matter much to be lamented, and one which calls for the serious and prayerful consideration of all christians. The causes, evils, and remedies of these divisions, are quite too large a subject, (if it were a pertinent one,) for these pages; and too large a subject probably, to be soon compassed by human wisdom. The church of Christ was originally one body; and I cannot doubt that it will be again restored to unity,—in effect, if not in form. With men this may be impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Meantime, as different denominations do, and will exist, it becomes an important question what should be our deportment towards those who differ from us. And,

1. We should cheerfully allow them the same liberty of opinion and of conscience, and the same freedom of discussion and dissemination of their sentiments, which we claim for ourselves. Intolerance is no part of christianity.

2. We should be willing to see and appreciate whatever of excellence they do possess; and should own them as fellow disciples, so far as they appear truly to possess and exemplify the christian spirit. We should admit their *virtues*, though we may not be able to admit their *pretensions*, and ought not to countenance their errors.

3. We should scrupulously refrain from *misrepresenting* either their doctrine or their practice. “Thou

shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." And though we may see much in them to disapprove of and regret, yet we should exercise as much of that charity as we can, (consistently with fidelity to Christ and to souls,) 'which envieth not, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things.'

4. We should use no endeavors to *proselyte* away their people,—provided we have reason to believe that they have truth and godliness enough among them to save souls. From any decidedly *heretical* communion, where souls are certain to be destroyed, I would think it not only lawful, but a duty, to draw away as many as by honest means I could, as brands out of the burning; but I would entice none from any evangelical preacher, church, or family. "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not covet." Dr. Doddridge acted both upon the divine command, and a common sentiment of honor among men, in the injunction which he habitually gave to his theological pupils, to "avoid every thing which looks like sheep-stealing."

But, on the other hand,

1. We have a right to prefer our own belief and order to those of other communions,—provided we have taken suitable pains to inform ourselves, and are intelligent and conscientious in our preference. It is no breach of charity to read and understand the Bible for ourselves.

2. We have a right to *show* our preference by adhering to our own communion with pious constancy,

and taking our children and friends with us. It is what we *ought* to do, in obedience to our convictions.

3. Though we should be forbearing and charitable towards other denominations, it is not incumbent on us directly to *build them up* to the pulling down of ourselves. We need not, out of a false charity, extol their doctrines, ways, or preachers, in disparagement of our own; nor is it our duty to forsake our own assemblies to encourage theirs;—especially when we have reason to believe that they have set up their meetings, or are conducting them, with proselyting designs. If we do honestly believe that they are more right than we are, the ingenuous course is to join them and belong to their fraternity. But if we have no such conviction, it is the part of consistency and duty to be steadfast where we are. Let us search the Scriptures, prayerfully and diligently, for the right way, and having found it, let us continue in it. One of the greatest evils resulting from a diversity of sects is the practice of running hither and thither between their worshipping assemblies. Let us be fixed in something; and, being settled, let us be settled; and not be moved out of our places by every sound of novelty, and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

4. It cannot be wrong, when attempts are made illicitly to draw away our members, to endeavor, by suitable means, to prevent them. If we honestly believe that the truth is with us, and that the God of truth favors us, we cannot be willing that our children and fel-

low-worshippers should be alienated from us. We love our own, and cannot wish either that they should be estranged from our acquaintance, or lost to our privileges. And if, moreover, we are persuaded that the denomination with which we are connected, is more valuable for its influence on the community, and the world, than others which would gain converts from it; if we believe it to be more faithful in its exertions to repress vice, and to promote intelligence and virtue among men; that it is more instructive, scriptural, and energetic in its sermons; and that it is doing more in the great work of sending abroad the gospel into all the earth; we cannot, as christians or as men, wish that its numbers should be diminished, or its influence curtailed.

The ways of proselytism are many. It would be neither a grateful, nor very easy task to specify them all: the following are some of the most common; and they need only to be mentioned to show how little they truly have to do with the spirit and objects of the gospel.

(1.) *Flattery.* There are individuals who, though they cannot be won to Christ by faithful dealing with their souls, can be won to a party in religion by assiduous flattering attentions. The convert and the converters, in such cases, commonly, are alike worthy of the means employed, and of the fellowship thus formed.

(2.) *Prejudice.* One of the most effective modes

of exciting prejudice against our own and some other denominations, is to misrepresent their doctrines. How many odious things have been called "*Calvinism!*" and published as such for popular effect. The "doctrines of grace," as they have been called, the doctrines which were embraced by the great body of the Reformers of the sixteenth century,—as their harmonious Confessions show,—embody more of the truth and power of the gospel, and have done, and are doing, more for the renovation of the world, intellectually and morally, than all other schemes beside,—as facts declare. But those doctrines,—*because* of their truth and power,—are not agreeable to the natural heart; which hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest its deeds should be reprov'd,—which hates especially God's sovereignty and man's dependence:—and nothing is easier than to excite that natural prejudice of the heart into active odium and disaffection towards both the truth and those who hold it;—especially when a little distortion is resorted to, and when, moreover, the attempt is made under an appearance of zeal for God and charity to souls. How often have pious Arminians and open infidels been collaborators in a work of this kind, though not associates,—assailing the same "walls of strength" with the same carnal weapons; though on opposite sides!

How ungrateful a thing it is, to be obliged to defend the truth of God against both friends and foes. But this we are often called to do. The writer of these

pages has seen copies of the "Saybrook Platform," (meaning the *Confession* attached to the Platform,) printed a hundred years ago, privily circulated among the members of a Congregational Society, he is ashamed to say by *preachers*, for the perusal of converts and inquirers, during a revival, having certain passages underscored, and with exclamation points and other significant notes affixed, together with verbal comments, designed to mislead the simple; and with these insidious *constructions* on them, declared to be the faith which we inculcate and require. A similar use is made of that Confession and of the Assembly's Catechism by allusions to them in pulpits. Does Religion need such practices as these?—such bad means to her good ends? *Non tali auxilio*, not such aid to her holy cause, *nec defensoribus istis!*

I have before remarked,* how much authority those Confessions have with us, and how far they are to be regarded as exhibiting our faith. Doubtless there are statements in them which might be modified for the better. Doubtless they need deliverance from the false constructions of those who make it their business to abuse them. But as it regards the great *system* of doctrines which they contain, they will, along with the Bible from which they are taken, withstand all the assaults which it may ever please the great adversary of truth to bring against them. Great is truth, and will prevail.

* At pp. 43, 44.

(3.) *High Church pretensions*; such as claiming to be the only true church; having the true order and succession; whose ordinances are alone valid; and consigning all without its pale—churches, ministers, and all, along with the common world, to “uncovenanted mercy;”—in a word, advertizing passengers that “we are the only safe ship.”

(4.) *By troubling tender consciences about modes and forms.* As an example for this, how many young converts, and even unconverted persons under concern of mind, have been embarrassed, and distressed, and kept halting, by an officious obtrusion on them of a certain mode of baptism, as indispensable to a due obedience to Christ. How often is the question put, Are you not going to follow Christ into the water? when the real question is, Are you not going to unite with *us*?

(5.) *Appeals to selfishness.* “Come with us, and you shall have nothing to *pay*!” That is, come with us, and we will exempt you from that which Christ has made your duty, Gal. vi. 6—8.

(6.) *Conniving at prevailing sins.* For example, how much of the reserve, or opposition, which is manifested by some churches, to the existing *temperance reformation*, may have its secret motive in the hope of gaining numbers to themselves by such means—it would be uncharitable to say.

(7.) *Favoring disaffection.* All societies of men, religious as well as others, will sometimes fall into disagreements about the management of their affairs.

When such things happen in parishes, then is the time to introduce, or to build up, another denomination. How easy is it to gain the confidence of a party to a quarrel! "See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" Indeed, how easy it is,—but how ungenerous!—to pull down a house already divided against itself, and out of its ruins to build another!

Another case in which the disaffected are encouraged, is, when a member of the church is under its censure. We sometimes see such an one received, listened to, and soothed, by those who would seem to be glad of a convert, of whatever character, and by whatever means obtained.

Such are the arts of proselyting. How little creditable are they to religion! Surely it cannot be wrong to discountenance such arts.

To preach the gospel according to one's own convictions of it, however earnestly or abundantly, to all who are disposed to hear, is what no one can reasonably object to. *That* is not proselytism: it is honest duty. Let such zeal be as successful as it will. So far as the simple force of the truth which any denomination holds and teaches, so far as their good example and the blessing of God prosper them, let them be prospered. Every Christian must rejoice: for such success is success to

the cause of Christ. But the simple zeal of making *proselytes to a sect*,—invading established and peaceful congregations and creeping into houses, with its arts of flattery and seduction, cannot be too much reprobated.

5. Though it is “good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity,” yet there are some *modes* of union, which, as the feelings of sects are, do not seem to be advisable.

One such mode is the building of *union meeting houses*. The plan is, for the several denominations of a place, they being too few to build several houses, to unite together in the erection of one for their common use, to be occupied in turns. Now this *appears* well; and if they all could truly rise above their sectarian feelings, and *keep* above them, it would be the happiest thing they could do. But it too generally happens that jealousies begin to arise; and contentions follow, with other unpleasant consequences. “Yonder,” said my informant, as I was passing a small village at the west, pointing to a handsome building, but now apparently neglected, and storm-worn through want of painting,—“Yonder is a church which was built by three denominations. They begun and finished it in much good feeling, but soon got into a quarrel about the occupancy of it, till finally it is occupied by neither of them, but is fallen into the hands of the Universalists, and is used by them and by any body that comes along.” Such is the history of one *joint-stock* meeting house.

Another union measure of questionable expediency is the temporary union of different denominations during a revival. This may be well in particular cases; but generally, so far as my own limited observation of the results of such unions enables me to judge, the measure does not appear to be best. The union is avowedly but temporary: it is entered into in the known expectation of soon dissolving it. Therefore, the *principle* of union cannot be very deep: it is a superficial feeling, though not altogether insincere. If it were that love, "strong as death," which "many waters cannot quench, nor floods drown," the union would be permanent. And as to the *motive* which induces the union, since it is known that the parties mutually expect to separate, and probably *with increase*, the motive will *look* questionable, however disinterested in reality it may be. As a *display of charity and good feeling*, therefore, (for which we hear them commended,) such comminglings do not appear to be very valuable—especially if the parties do not separate as amicably as they came together. They might have found quite as many means of mutual courtesy and good feeling, remaining separate.

But it is difficult to keep out the *apprehension*, at least, that one party may use undue means to get advantage of the other. It is difficult, indeed, to keep out the thing itself. And how little are the distrust and the disquietudes which hence arise, favorable to the spirit which is proper to a revival! They pervade

the thoughts, the conversation, the prayers—of individuals, if not all; they become visible in intercourse; they divert attention, corrupt the feelings, and grieve the Spirit: and in the end, probably, the great interest is little benefited by the union.

If, as was before remarked, they all could merge their sectarian feelings in the measure *entirely*; if they could alike forget Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, in their common attachment to Christ, and had grace enough entirely to fulfil the precept of the apostle, Phil. ii. 2—4; the expediency of the measure could not be doubtful. But then,—if they had so much grace as that,—they would cease to exist as separate denominations.

On the whole, then, our imperfections being such as they are, it seems best, in the particular case before us, that each denomination should go on in its own way;—with as much good will, however, and as little embarrassment to the others, as it can.

I should be sorry, if, in these remarks, I should seem to hinder the union of the followers of Christ, in any way in which such union is practicable and hopeful. The existence of sects ought to be, and doubtless is, an affliction to every Christian. It is so unnatural a state of things in the family of Christ, so repugnant to his will, doubtless, and so obstructive to his cause on earth, that it is incumbent on all to labor to do away, rather than to widen and perpetuate, those divisions. In such an age as this,—so near the millennium, as we hope,—

every disciple of Christ should be cultivating within and around him the spirit of that union which surely will prevail in that expected happy period.

In what particular manner the wisdom of God may bring about that union, we may not be able to anticipate; but it seems evident that it can never be, without mutual and free concession by all. No one existing denomination,—it is idle to suppose it,—will ever convert to itself all the others, and become the alone church militant on the earth. All Churchmen, or all Baptists, or Methodists, or Presbyterians, as denominations are now constituted, the world will never behold. Their existing narrow enclosures are not wide enough for so large a comprehension. The union must take place upon the most catholic views of the Bible; and all *human* authorities,—fathers, counsels, creeds, directories, and authors,—must be surrendered up to the simple supremacy of the book of God, and to an untrammelled conscience; and the bigotry of sect give place to the more extended love of the family of Christ. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how the distinctions of sect can ever be less than they are, so long as each denomination so pertinaciously adheres to its human standards, to the exclusion of the Bible,—practically, if not professedly,—as the common and *only* authoritative book of reference.

As to our own denomination, I cannot but hope that there is much in its existing polity and spirit which is

favorable to union. The word of God is already,—it ever has been,—their only authoritative Confession and Directory. They are ready to turn, with all the churches, to the great position with which they all set out at the Reformation, that The Bible, the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants. They are not only free to commune with Christians of every name at the table of the Lord, which is a small thing, comparatively; but they are ready to co-operate with them, with good faith and heartily, in any benevolent work. Of this spirit in them, nearly every truly liberal and unsectarian institution in this country is their witness. The American Bible, Tract, Education, Temperance, Prison Discipline, and other kindred institutions, in which it has been aimed to secure the co-operation of all denominations, were originated solely, or mainly by them, and have been eminently sustained by their counsels, labors, and contributions. They have their partialities, doubtless, for their own faith and order; they believe them to be founded on the Bible: yet they set up no exclusive pretensions of being the only legitimate church. They have not, to my knowledge, in their numerous colleges and seminaries, a single professorship whose duty it is to inculcate their particular scheme of polity; it is little discussed in their pulpits, or even in their books: and so little pains is taken to cherish sectarian partialities in their members, so little are their children nursed up in the narrow faith of *distinctives* and *exclusives*, and *jure divino pretensions*, and so little are they in fact

attached to the body by mere sectarian feeling, that, of all people, Congregationalists, when deprived of the privilege of worshiping with those of their own communion, most easily attach themselves to others.*

I would not, in these remarks, in the least discredit the liberality of other denominations. There is much in them all—and much, I would hope, in the spirit of the age, that is liberal and catholic. Nor is it pretended that Congregationalists have not their share of human imperfection, or that they are in no degree sectarian; yet, I would fain believe, that of them it may be said, if of any, they have little of the narrowness of sect. The salvation of man is their object, their field the world, and their “pale” the kingdom of Christ.

* This accounts for the fact that almost every marriage which takes place between a Congregationalist and one of another persuasion, occasions the removal of the former into the religious communion of the latter; the Congregationalist being detained by no bigoted attachment to a name, and giving way to the conscientious sectarian scruples in which the other has been educated. This accounts, too, for the facility with which too many of their members are proselyted from them.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE theme of this concluding chapter, is suggested by the title of the Volume—"THE PRACTICAL CHURCH MEMBER."

The *practical man*, in any department of life, is the man who, under the guidance of a sound judgment, applies himself with efficiency to the objects before him. His wisdom is a *common sense* wisdom, in distinction from visionary theory, and an *effective* wisdom, in distinction from inactive contemplation and unproductive emotion. The *practical Christian*, then, is the Christian who applies himself with good sense and efficiency to the business of religion.

Jesus himself was a perfect example of practical religion. His was not a religion of pious emotions merely, beginning and terminating in himself; but it was also a religion of judicious and effective beneficence. Much less was he carried away by that blind impulsive zeal which pays no regard to men and things as they are. He was at once holy, active, and discreet. He taught his disciples to be the same. When he sent them forth on the great business of propagating his gospel, he put discretion and inoffensiveness together, along with

fidelity and boldness, into the instructions which were to guide them in their work. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Every Christian ought to be,—but not every one *is*,—a practical disciple. The gospel requires such. If we consider the great objects it has to accomplish by means of its disciples,—that the world is to be converted,—its wickedness overcome, its blindness instructed, its lusts subdued, its sentiments, manners, and condition, universally changed,—we shall perceive that the utmost wisdom and the utmost energy are requisite for so arduous a work. We shall perceive that a religion which is merely contemplative and devout, or merely inoffensive and guileless, however amiable; much more, a religion which is nowhere visible, nowhere felt, but within church walls,—whose solemnity, or whose fervor begins and ends with the exercises of the worshiping assembly; most of all, a religion extravagant, fanatical, and reckless, is not a religion which can answer the ends of the gospel.

The character of the *age*, too, eminently requires that our religion should be of the practical kind which we are considering. It is an age of great activity and excitement—of great enterprises and great conflicts. Discussions, projects, measures, inharmonious and endless, require the decision and action of every serious man.

It may not, therefore, be unprofitable, nor foreign from the general design of this volume, to conclude with a brief view of some of those qualities which the gospel requires, *always*, in its professors, and more especially in an age like this. What are the qualities of the "practical church member?"

1. *Personal holiness.* This lies at the foundation. Without eminent holiness we cannot effect much for the cause of Christ. For it is obvious that we can neither exemplify nor propagate religion any farther than we ourselves possess it. The lamp that lacks oil, and is not trimmed, will shine but dimly; nor will our zeal be warmer than our love; or, at least, however fervid it may be, it will be no better than our knowledge, and no holier than our motives. *Devoted* piety alone is *effective* piety.

2. *Prayer.* Among the *habits* to be maintained, this is the leading one. Its influence pervades the life, and is essential to every duty. If the Christian "lack wisdom," or lack faith, or fervor, or boldness, or any grace, his proper resource is prayer. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." In proportion as we live in intimate communion with God, walking in the light of his countenance, and asking wisdom of him, our perceptions will be simple, clear, unbiassed by the world, and wise; our faith vivid; our hope animated; our zeal constant; and our example convincing and persua-

sive. "Prayer draws all the Christian graces into its focus. It draws Charity, followed by her lovely train, her forbearance with faults, her forgiveness of injuries, her pity for errors, her compassion for want. It draws Repentance, with her holy sorrows, her pious resolutions, her self-distrust. It attracts Faith, with her elevated eye—Hope, with her grasped anchor—Beneficence, with her open hand—Zeal, looking far and wide to serve—Humanity, with introverted eye, looking at home. Prayer, by quickening these graces in the heart, warms them into life, fits them for service, and dismisses each to its appropriate practice."*

Without habitual prayer, no one can truly serve the cause of Christ. He will either be settled on his lees, or else, if he be active, his action will be irregular, and his influence unsound.

3. *Religious knowledge.* All knowledge is desirable to the Christian; but a knowledge of the Scriptures is indispensable. He cannot "instruct those that oppose themselves," nor "give to him that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him," any farther than he is "ready" to do so by his knowledge of the gospel system. Indeed, it is preposterous to think of advancing the religion of the Bible, being ignorant *of* the Bible. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." How many passages there are which speak of a knowledge of the Scriptures as an essential requisite to usefulness!

* Hannah More.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Every Christian, therefore, who would be useful, should, like Apollos, be “mighty in the Scriptures.” By daily study of them he should make his understanding familiar with their truths, his memory with their language, and his heart with their spirit.” “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”

4. A *sound faith*. This is implied in the foregoing paragraph, but is worthy of a distinct consideration. The whole energy of the gospel is in its *doctrines*. Its *precepts* are, it is true, a perfect rule of life; and, as such, are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path: but as a means of reforming men, they are powerless without the doctrines. The doctrines are the *foundation* of the precepts, and furnish the *motives* to obey them. All duties are prescribed, all invitations and warnings uttered, all appeals to the affections and conscience made, in view of those great facts, or truths, which form the doctrinal part of theology,—which respect the attributes and government of God, the fallen state of man, the retributions of eternity, the mediation of Christ, the necessity of regeneration, the work of the Spirit, with other connected truths. In proportion as these are denied, impaired, or sunk out of view, the gospel

loses its consistency and meaning, and like a temple robbed of its key-stones and columns, is reduced to a shapeless ruin. Hence we are directed to “contend earnestly for the *faith* once delivered to the saints,” and to “hold fast the form of *sound words*.” And hence, also, almost all the enmity of ungodly men is vented against the doctrines rather than the ethics of the Bible.

It is therefore of the utmost importance, in a *practical* point of view, to maintain the doctrines of the gospel in all their prominence and force. To desert or surrender these, is to abandon the heavy ordnance of Christianity and put a period to her conquests.

This is not the place to state or to defend the doctrinal system of the Congregational churches. But when it is considered that the doctrines embraced by them are the same with those which were embraced by the Reformers, those great lights whose glory shall never be extinguished—that it was by means of these doctrines, and of the men who held them, that God wrought so great an overthrow of the Papal domination; that these were the doctrines of the Puritans, the Huguenotts, and of all kindred and persecuted men, of every age and country; and when we perceive that wherever this system of doctrines has been faithfully inculcated, the effect has been most singularly happy on the habits and institutions of the people; we cannot doubt that they are essentially the faith which was once delivered to the saints. God does not effect so great and happy changes

by means of error. He does not thus connect his agency with doctrines of man's devising, "working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

It is no proof of the unsoundness of the doctrines we are considering, that they are hated of wicked men: it is rather a proof of their divinity. The truth of God, whatever it may be, was not *made* to *please* men, but to *reform* them; and when was it ever known that wicked men were delighted with *any* doctrine which demanded and enforced their reformation? And what denial or modification of the truth of God was ever made, but to accommodate objectors, replying against God and saying, "Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" and "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" That which pleases men in their sins, is self-evidently not truth; but is some "persuasion" which "cometh not of him that calleth you."

The practical disciple, I repeat, then, will not surrender, nor timidly conceal, the essential doctrines of the gospel; nor tremble to hear them preached.

I fear there is a tendency in the times to lose sight of the importance of this subject. It is almost a necessary consequence, that in the multiplicity of our religious engagements, and in the abundance of our religious intelligence, in this age of benevolence, we should become diminutive in doctrinal knowledge. And herein is a danger to be guarded against. In all our plans and labors for Christianity, let us not lose sight of its doctrines. These,—as we would promote a healthful state

of things,—must be “the light of all our measures, the soul of all our preaching, the stimulus and guide of all our zeal, the antidote to all confusion and wild disorder.” How frankly, how lucidly, and how constantly will the great doctrines of the gospel be preached, and how complacently listened to, in the millennium—that happy period of which it is written, “Wisdom and KNOWLEDGE shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation!”

5. *A just concern for the purity of the Church.* The practical church member considers that the world is to be converted by means of the church. If ever it is to be raised out of its present corruption and misery, the church, under God, is to do it. Ye are the light of the world: ye are the salt of the earth. The church must therefore be fervent and pure. Her energy must be a holy energy. Being herself corrupt, she cannot purify the world, or being dark, she cannot enlighten it,—cannot remove the darkness which covers the earth, and the gross darkness which covers the people. Dark and cold masses, like frozen mountains, do but increase the darkness and chill of the regions around them. And corrupt bodies increase corruption. The faithful disciple will therefore labor to maintain the church at an elevated standard,—pure in doctrine, exemplary in morals, and strict in discipline.

6. *Judgment, or sound Discretion.* If ever there

was a time when people needed to "have their senses exercised, to discern both good and evil," or when common sense was a valuable quality, the present is such a time. The land is filled with all sorts of proposals, doctrines, and disputes—"wine questions," "slavery questions," "measures," "schools," and "*isms*," with many things, the contentions about which are more to be deprecated, perhaps, than the things themselves. It is an old trick of the adversary, to be working *through* the friends of the cause of Christ, not less than *with* its opposers. It may be so at the present! "We are not ignorant of his devices." Therefore it becomes us to be wary. There are false lights upon the coast: let us ask guidance from above, consult our chart, and use our judgment.

But though we "believe not every spirit," yet, on the other hand, let us not be universally fearful, incredulous, and stationary. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good: and do with thy might whatsoever thy hand findeth to do.

7. Another requisite is *Candor*. The discussions of the day are carried on with so much zeal as to draw men into *parties* and party *feelings*. "Verily, (says an old author,) there is an inebriety in the minds of men, which, as ever they quit one extreme, do stagger to the other." Men crowd to opposite extremes, taking their temper and judgment with them, while the "golden mean," commonly, is the region truth. Let candor

keep us from the "inebriety" of the times. There is, it is true, "a right and a wrong to every question;" but it may be so handled by the parties, that truth shall be halved, and charity slain, between them.

8. And another requisite is *Prudence*. Many good men, in the ardor of their philanthropy, seem too reckless of consequences. "The driving is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." Their doctrine is "Do duty, and leave consequences to God." The doctrine is good in the abstract: but if it be meant that consequences are to be left out of view in determining what duty *is*, it is at war with the precept, Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

But on the other hand, let not base timidity, or cold indifference, cover itself with a pretext of prudence. Timidity and sloth will never convert the world.

" Those cold ways,
That seem like prudent helps, are very poisonous,
When the disease is violent."

9. *Liberality*. We are arrived at that age of the world when "the vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful." The work of converting the world is undertaken, and is making its appeals to all the liberal of the earth; and he that has no largeness of views, and of heart, is unfit for the

times. Repent, such, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

And what are the views which the practical Christian takes of the work before us? He considers how it is to be done. Not by dreaming and looking for the millennium; not by praying, Thy kingdom come, merely; not by an inactive confidence in the divine prediction that the heathen shall be given to Christ for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession: but he sees that the work is to be done, like every other work on earth, by human labors and sacrifices. How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? These to him are *practical* questions,—with others which come in their train: How shall they be “sent?” and how sustained? There must be ships and other conveyances to carry them out—over sea and over land; and there must be money, presses, books, and whatever is requisite to missionary labors. And when he considers that there are less than ten millions of evangelical Christians, probably, to gospelize some sixty times that number of heathen, he will see that no man’s means, no man’s agency, no man’s prayers can be uncalled for in so great an enterprise. And as a practical man, honestly meaning to serve God and his generation, he will give his heart, his hand, and his substance to the work. He will *do good* according to his ability not only in one, but in every department of action—

revivals—the Sabbath school—moral reform, and whatever pertains to the labors of Christian philanthropy. And he will take practical views of the promises; and believing that he that watereth shall be watered himself, will see the bearing of all such beneficent action, not only upon the far off heathen, but upon the world about him, upon the church of his immediate fellowship, and upon his heart within. Such is the practical Christian in regard to the world's renovation. Such is the Christian which is needed by the gospel and required by the times.

10. *Constancy.* “Be not weary in well doing.” The success of the cause of Christ requires that we be uniform and constant in our devotedness to it. The opposition to it is constant, and, like a body rolled up hill, or a ship against the stream, it can be carried forward only by a constancy as unremitting as the resistance. The wickedness of the world is like a conflagration: if we pause in our exertions, the flame increases its rage. Water must be thrown at all points, and constantly.

There are two sorts of Christians, who may be described as the *constant* and the *variable*; whose behavior is as different as the principles which govern them. The one sort are governed by a simple regard to *duty*; and as duty is a uniform principle, the conduct resulting from it is likewise uniform. The other sort are governed by *feeling*; and as feeling is as unsteady as the wind, which is sometimes east and sometimes west, sometimes stagnant and sometimes violent and gusty, so is their

religion. They acknowledge, indeed, and mean, perhaps, to be governed by the great principle of religious duty ; but if we observe their conduct, it will be evident that their *immediate acts* are directed by their feelings. Every voice of duty is met and answered by a conferring with flesh and blood. They consult weariness, expediency, the agreeableness or disagreeableness of the duty, the existing state of things, and whatever may affect their present inclination.

Now it is obvious that the cause of Christ can never be much promoted by an inconstant and uncertain man. Confidence in him is that confidence in an unfaithful messenger which is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint.

Take him simply as an exhibition of religion to the world. Example, to be convincing, must be consistent. But what greater contradiction is there in the eyes of men, than to be sometimes hot and sometimes cold, in so great a matter as religion—supposing it to be true ? The one state denies the sincerity, and nullifies the influence, of the other. We are commanded to let our light shine before men ; but a light, to be serviceable, must burn with a steady flame. That which flares and flickers, sometimes a flaming torch, and sometimes a dying taper, is of little use. It does not *light* the traveler, but *confounds* him. By throwing alternate light and darkness on his path, it increases his perplexity and danger of stumbling.

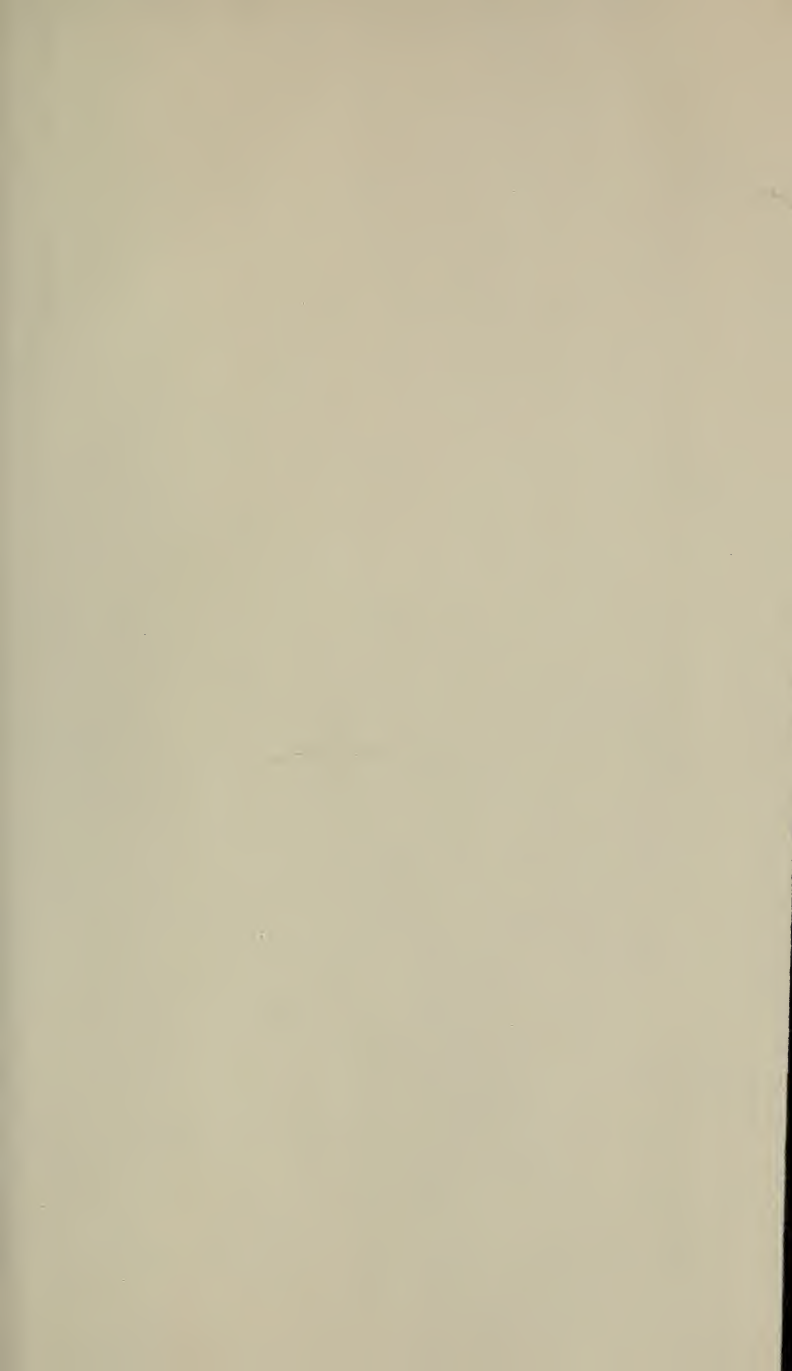
A good man's influence gathers force from its uniformity and continuance. Like the rolling snow-ball, it

enlarges as it proceeds. *Other* men have *turns* of being serious ; but fall away and satisfy beholders of the vanity of their religion. If the professor has but turns, what does his case amount to, more than others ? When one is first converted, it is still doubtful if he is truly what he seems. It remains to be shown by time. The world watches him in the new way, till, by his visible perseverance in it, the conviction becomes a settled one, that his religion is a reality. That established, his example, his sentiments, prayers, reproofs, have power with ungodly men.

If we would be truly subservient to the cause of Christ, then, we must be steadfast and constant. And in order to this, a sense of duty, and not our feelings merely, must in all cases control our actions. Let us remember that God himself is governed by fixed principles,—with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning ; that the Bible is a book of principles ; and that principle is the basis of all true religion. And on the other hand, *feeling*,—present inclination—is the leaven of all irreligion and all wrong religion. It is the wind that carries heresy and fanaticism about. How far is the principle which governs the movements of the inconstant professor from that of the people whom the Bible reprobates as children tossed to and fro—clouds carried about—wells without water—double minded and unstable in all their ways ? The *steadfast* Christian—universally faithful, and always alive in the service of Christ—he alone is the Practical Church Member.

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